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CHLOE MALONE

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Chloe leaned on the railing and looked down at him
FRONTISPIECE. See page 131.

THE MAJESTY

PAULINE HENRY, 1877

THE MAJESTY
PAULINE HENRY, 1877

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BOSTON
LITTLE, BROWN, AND COMPANY
1877

CHLOE MALONE

BY
FANNIE HEASLIP LEA

WITH ILLUSTRATIONS BY
F. GRAHAM COOTES



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LITTLE, BROWN, AND COMPANY

1916

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To
JAMES J. LEA



LIST OF ILLUSTRATIONS

CHLOE LEANED ON THE RAILING AND LOOKED DOWN AT HIM	<i>Frontispiece</i>
" IF YOU EVER WANT ANYTHING OF ME," SHE FINISHED RECKLESSLY, " ASK IT — THAT'S ALL! "	PAGE 48
" DON'T," SHE HEARD HERSELF SAY, IN A SMALL SHAKEN VOICE	" 70
" FATHER, WHAT SEEMS TO YOU RIGHT IS THE BEST THING FOR YOU TO DO, ISN'T IT? "	" 242



CHLOE MALONE

CHAPTER I

THE story of Chloe Malone properly begins upon a wet and shiny night in mid-November, and before a mirror.

The mirror was old, although Chloe was young. Its long, French beveled glass was set in tarnished gilt and topped off with a true lover's knot embedded in delightfully inaccurate roses. In another and stormier day the mirror had been the property of Chloe's great-great-grandmother, Madame de Jumonville. It had reflected patches and powder and the exquisite dignity of a dancer of the minuet. From the south wall of Madame's drawing-room it had reflected also, upon a certain June twilight, a kiss, a black-browed observer, and the blow of a glove upon a cheek that flamed to feel it. Later, it had reflected widow's

weeds and a little lad looking for his father. Those were the days of the Duelling Oaks in old New Orleans, and Madame de Jumonville, who saw her husband go forth at five o'clock of a flawless morning, saw him brought back at seven with a little hole above his heart, and an inscrutable silence stiffening upon his lips.

After all, the kiss may not have been the lady's fault. She refused ever again to see the man who had kissed her and went down to her grave attended by all the *bienséances*; meantime the mirror had seen what it had seen.

As for Chloe, when it came her time to be a woman, the mirror adorned her bedroom, and upon that wet and shiny night it gave back the snow-white and rose-red of a *débutante*. Chloe was making her bow to the world.

On the little white bed lay a coat of sapphire velvet with a collar of fur, long white gloves, an ivory-sticked fan, and a little lace handkerchief. On the table beside Chloe's prayer book, a volume of Keats, and a new magazine, were flowers,—valley lilies, tied with silver gauze into a sheaf fit for the slimmest, whitest arm that ever reached for the moon and drew down a green cheese.

Chloe's mother, in carefully preserved black



lace and jet, regarded her daughter from the doorway. On her knees at Chloe's feet, Celestine, the small black woman who had grown old in the Malones' service, fussed with two pretty slippers.

"Seems like yo' gwine cotch er turrible cold; wuss'n no stockin's 'tall," she grumbled to herself.

Chloe, the white and silver of her diaphanous gown shimmering at every eager movement, stood poised in the middle of the room and lifted soft bare arms above her head.

"I'm sleepy," she said, the merest thread of laughter running through her soft slow voice. "I give you my word, I'm sleepy—before we start."

She went to the mirror and stood there looking at herself, one hand resting a little below her hip in a gesture faintly foreign, her head thrown back, her eyes narrowed.

Red lips, black eyes, and soft, thick, blue-black hair the mirror showed her in the glare of the gas-light at its side; further than that, white shoulders still immaturely slender, and the lift of a rounded chin.

"Not bad, my dear!" said Chloe to the girl in the mirror. "Joy go with you!" Then she

threw herself a kiss from the tips of her fingers and picked up her coat. When she had put on the coat, though, she still lingered before the glass.

"Will I do—perfectly?" she demanded, with a suggestion of nervousness.

"I think," said the mother, coming into the room, her pretty gray head critically tipped, "that you will do very nicely."

Chloe began to pull on her gloves.

"It makes me ill," she said distinctly, "to think what all this costs—and we haven't got it to spend."

"Unless you wish to retire from the world," Mrs. Malone reminded her with gentle dignity, "it is necessary that you make your début. We owe something to ourselves, my child."

"Also," said Chloe, "to the butcher, the baker, and the candlestick maker. Overlooking the grocer completely."

"They can wait."

"Yes," said Chloe. "Poor ducks! Likely they'll have to."

She smoothed her gloves and frowned. Suddenly she went to her mother and took the soft unwrinkled face between her hands with a passionate little gesture that might well have

come down to her from Madame, her great-great-grandmother.

"Do you know what I'm going into the world for, to-night?" she demanded. "I'm going to look for a millionaire, a nice, gentle, bald-headed millionaire with bags and bags of money. And when I find him, I'm going to marry him, so that I can give you a limousine, and accounts at all the shops you'd like but can't afford now, and a maid to bring you your coffee in bed every morning—eh? That's what I'm going to do. I'm sick of being poor; I'm sick of seeing you drudge to keep up appearances; I'm sick of knowing that my clothes and my hats and all I have come from the sacrifice of the things you love most in the world. Where's your diamond cross? Where's grandmother's rosewood sewing table? Where's your—?"

"Chloe!" cried her mother sharply.

"You thought I had no eyes," said Chloe. "Didn't you? Kiss your child, you darling mole!"

She stifled her mother in a fierce little hug.

"Foolish baby!" said Mrs. Malone, uncertainly stern. "Do you want to ruin your dress?"

"I do not," Chloe retorted. "It's got to charm my millionaire, this frock. It must make him look twice at me. The rest will be easy."

She picked up her valley lilies, tucked the little lace handkerchief inside her girdle, and saluted with the fan.

"Sir," she said dramatically, "I report the youngest private! Ready to attack!"

"Macaque!" chided her mother softly.

They paused at the threshold, small proud mother and slim gallant girl, and eyes that had seen a fairish number of years go by looked wistfully into eyes that had not.

"Chloe," said Mrs. Malone hesitantly. She fingered a spray of the valley lilies. "Chloe—it is not a thing for jest—marriage without love."

"And marriage without money?" retorted Chloe, patting her mother's fingers. "Not my idea of humor, I assure you."

"I could not bear to see you live the life that I have lived," said the mother slowly. "You are—too soft—too young."

"Father!" said Chloe suddenly. "My father—was he poor at first? You needn't tell me unless you like."

Mrs. Malone smiled curiously.

"He had plenty," she said. "And so had I. We—how do you say?—ran through it. We were both young, both fond of pleasure, both foolish. It melted in our fingers. Then, when you had only three years, he died,"—she crossed herself perfunctorily,—“and the rest was for me to do.”

"It's an abominable world," said Chloe slowly. Her soft red lips looked ill-fitted to the words they framed. "And poverty's the cruelest thing in it. A little wisp of a thing like you with a big hulking baby to take care of—all by yourself!"

"You were never a big hulking baby," Mrs. Malone corrected jealously. "And I was able; I had merely to learn. Only," she stopped, then went on again in desperation, "it was bad enough for *me*; I could not bear to see a life like that begin again for you; bare, cold, cruel, always a struggle, never the softness and the warmth! Chloe! If you love a poor man, you will break my heart. I am not a hard woman, but I, your mother, tell you that." She put her finger tips to her eyes.

"And if you cry, you will spoil your pretty face, and people will say you have a bad

daughter," said Chloe severely. She added, with her arm around her mother's still slender waist, her lips against her mother's cheek, "I'm not going to love a poor man. I made up my mind to that when I was only a little girl. I am going to make a wonderful marriage, just as one would make a wonderful picture, or a wonderful book. I shan't let myself love—until it is wise."

Some hidden spring of laughter bubbled to the surface of Mrs. Malone's sad eyes.

"Let love!" she echoed. "If one only could."

"You will see," said Chloe coolly.

From the top of the stairs she turned to fix a reproachful gaze on her mother.

"There is a machine at the door, a limousine."

"Did you think," Mrs. Malone returned, superbly calm, "that you would ride to your first night of the Opera in a street car—or perhaps a milk wagon?"

"I know what they cost," said Chloe grimly. "What went to pay for that? Oh, very well; there is one more reason for my millionaire. I am taking my last ride on your jewels and grandmother's mahogany." She settled her

mother's coat with a jealously tender hand. "No need to go into battle lopsided. Come on, sweetest."

The limousine opened its door to receive them and bore them smoothly away down the long wet street, where arc lights trailed clouds of glory through the silent mist, and in the mud of the crossings golden reflections lay like fallen dreams.

"When I am happy," said Chloe at the end of the fourth block only, "I purr like a cat. Listen!"

She drew her sapphire velvet coat closer about her and leaned back upon the cushions luxuriously. "I'm playing it's mine, really. The chauffeur's name is Boggs. Isn't that a perfect name for a chauffeur? And how do you like his new livery?"

"I see a hole in his sleeve," stated her mother.

Chloe stared through an imaginary lorgnette. "There are no holes in the sleeves of dreams," she said coldly. "He is an excellent young man, I assure you. Neither smokes, drinks, nor eats. He is a Frenchman—"

"*Mais enfin!*" murmured Mrs. Malone softly, "name Boggs?"

"Aren't I French—and Irish and English—

name Malone?" Chloe mocked lightly. "Yes, he is French. Very temperamental, my dear. I am always paying his fines for speeding. Rather a nuisance, but I like to look at the back of his neck, so I pay the fines and keep him."

"Chloe!" scolded her mother on the edge of a laugh.

"Do you think any one will notice me to-night?" said Chloe suddenly. "I think it's a silly custom, making your *début* at the first night of the Opera, instead of a party. Though it *is* lucky for us. Wherever would we have got the party? Suppose no one should come to talk to me between the acts? Mother, I tell you quite solemnly, if no one comes to talk to me, I shall get under your chair and cry. It would kill me, it would positively kill me to be a wallflower."

"I do not know what is a wallflower," her mother told her calmly. "But I do wish that I had given you some orange-flower water to drink before we started. You are nervous, Chloe."

"I am as nervous as a witch," Chloe admitted gravely. "For a fast limousine I think this is the slowest I ever rode in. Why are we going down St. Charles Street? And did I tell you

that—Oh, do you suppose he has his chains on? We're skidding frightfully. Isn't that Second now?"

"This is Third Street," said Mrs. Malone.

"Boggs is so reckless," Chloe began loftily. "He never—"

A crash and a rending jar took her breath. Alongside the limousine lights flashed and stopped. The world seemed for a moment to spin like a pin-wheel. There were loud voices and the rumble of profanity.

"My child!" cried Mrs. Malone in horror. Her hands, groping, found Chloe's firm clasp.

"It's all right, *chère petite*!" said a cool young voice. "I think we've just done something to another machine. It tried to crowd us. Don't be frightened. You're not hurt."

"And you?" shrilled the mother-note.

"I'm going to see what's wrong," Chloe announced, with one hand on the door. "Sit still now."

CHAPTER II

SHE opened the door of the limousine and called clearly to the chauffeur:

"What is the trouble? Be good enough to come here."

The chauffeur stumbled hurriedly to her call.

"It's a taxi," he explained soothingly. "Tried to pass us, and we took a wheel off—nothin' to be frightened about, miss. Man's got a little scratch on his hand, that's all. Hope you wasn't jolted bad."

"What man?" asked Chloe imperiously.

"Man in the taxi."

"Tell him to come here. Can you go on at once?"

The chauffeur grinned. "Soon as the cop'll let us."

"Tell him it is important. And tell the man from the taxi I wish to speak to him."

"Yes'm," said the false Boggs respectfully. He withdrew into the murk.

"Chloe!" Mrs. Malone protested from the depths of the limousine.

"I'm only going to ask if he's hurt, Mother, and tell him he should have been more careful."

"I beg your pardon," said a curt, half-amused voice at the door. "Your chauffeur says you wish to see me?"

Chloe turned swiftly, with a haughty little lift of her chin, the dark fur of her collar soft against her vivid face.

"You were in that taxi?" she inquired.

"I was," said the man in the doorway, "and I'm in rather a hurry, if you'll pardon my mentioning it. I'm supposed to catch a train at seven-fifty, and it's seven-thirty-five now."

He looked at Chloe with a species of humorous detachment. His eyes were gray and cool, but his mouth had a likable width, and his teeth when he smiled were very white. He spoke with the clipped inflection of a well-bred Easterner, and he spoke briefly.

"Oh—I'm terribly sorry!" said Chloe impulsively. The young man smiled.

"Thanks," he said, and put a hand, the left, to his hat. "I won't keep you."

"How are you going to make your train?" Chloe demanded.

"Not at all, apparently."

"Is it—important?"

"To me, extremely."

Chloe bit her lip for the space of a second.

"We will take you down," she said definitely, "if you will get in with us. No—it isn't any trouble—we shall be glad to. Don't waste any more time talking about it. It isn't very much out of our way. Please get in."

"Chloe!" came in a hushed and horrified whisper from the maternal background.

The young man hesitated, his foot on the running board of the machine.

"You are quite sure—" he began.

"I am absolutely sure," said Chloe impatiently, "that we shall never be able to make it, if you don't get in at once."

"Then thank you very much," said the stranger with an amused meekness, and got in, carrying a much-traveled pigskin bag.

Chloe beckoned the chauffeur, who in the rôle of *deus ex machina* was by this time leaning disinterestedly against a dripping tree and observing the play of events.

"Take us to the station," she ordered (a murmur behind her prompted specifically), "the Union Station, and get us there in time

for the seven-fifty train. You understand, Boggs?"

Boggs looked at his watch.

"I don't know how it can be done," he objected.

"Suppose you try," said Chloe and added, with a deliciously deliberate appeal, "if you please!"

"I'll sure try," said Boggs on the impetus of who knows what waft of fragrance from the valley lilies in Chloe's arm. "We're off, miss!"

He was in his seat and deep among levers before Chloe had fairly closed the door. The car started with a groan and a snort. Behind it, the taxi, lamentably minus a wheel, crouched on one haunch and glared through its lamps at an unfeeling universe.

Between her mother and the strange young man Chloe settled herself with all the sweet composure of a woman of experience.

"If you will tell me your name," she suggested delicately, "I will present you to my mother."

"My name," stated the guest, with a touch of formality, "is Wheeler—Courtenay Wheeler."

"My mother is Mrs. Dennis Malone," said Chloe in dignified return. "Mother, may I present Mr. Wheeler?"

Mrs. Malone murmured something softly appropriate. A little more light in the limousine might have revealed a conflict of emotions on her face.

"I," said the mistress of ceremonies, enjoying herself extremely, "am Chloe Malone." She added primly: "The chauffeur's name is Boggs."

"Good old name," said the young man gravely. "I'm very much afraid, though, that you're going out of your way to do me this kindness. I know it's the first night of the Opera, and I should, personally, cherish a strong dislike for any one who did me out of *Celeste Aida* on the first night."

"To-night," said Chloe, condescending delightfully, "*Aida* plays second fiddle. I am making my début."

A little winged sentence hurled itself from Mrs. Malone's corner of the limousine.

"Mr. Wheeler may not speak French, darling," Chloe reproved gently. She translated, her soft words tipped with a witch-fire of deviltry.

"My mother says, am I mad? And that you are a total stranger."

Mrs. Malone gasped.

"Your mother is quite right," said Mr. Wheeler. "I do speak French, however, rather badly." He added in that language that he should like, even though unhappily a stranger, to make Miss Malone his compliments and wish her every joy in the great world into which she was going. The limousine skidded beneath a great silver flower of an arc light and showed a relenting smile upon the mother's face. The stranger, speaking French, could not be other than a gentleman.

"You are very kind," said Mrs. Malone sincerely.

"Personally," said Chloe, on a murmur of unnecessary laughter, "I prefer my compliments in English or Irish." Then, before his answer could take form, she melted to a young and eager sympathy: "I forgot—oh, I quite forgot! He said your hand was hurt."

"It's nothing. I'd forgotten it myself."

"Let me see."

"I assure you it's nothing to speak of."

"I should prefer to see," said Miss Malone

regally, "since it was I, in my car, with my chauffeur Boggs, who did the damage."

"In that case, of course," said Mr. Wheeler submissively and held out the injured member for inspection. "Broken glass did it," he added briefly. "Perfectly clean cut."

It was a clean cut, and neither so deep as a well, nor so wide as a church door, but extending, for all that, nearly across the back of a very capable-looking hand, and Chloe caught her breath when she looked at it. An instant later she set her lips and felt for a handkerchief, the little lace one.

"Not exactly!" cried Mr. Wheeler, with a movement of horror. "I shouldn't think of letting you. Here!"

He produced a square of linen modestly initialed in one corner.

"Tear it in half," said Chloe.

He tore it in half.

"Now give it to me."

He did as he was told.

"Keep your hand steady," she commanded.

Mrs. Malone, in a helpless but uneasy silence, watched the evolution of a highly workmanlike bandage, for the swifter completion of which Chloe had thrust her sheaf of

valley lilies calmly into her mother's arms.

"*Mais enfin, mon enfant!*" began the lady, remembered that, to the stranger, French was no disguise, and dropped back in her corner somewhat fluttered.

"I think," said Chloe after a moment, "that this will do for the time being. When you get on the train, Mr. Wheeler, have the porter bring you some very hot water and wash the cut. You must have some sort of antiseptic in your bag, haven't you?"

"Alcohol," said Mr. Wheeler, his eyes respectful, but his mouth twitching at the corners.

Chloe tightened her bandage with a scientific thoroughness.

"That's very good. Use lots of it. Where are we now, Mother?"

Startled by the sudden question, Mrs. Malone admitted that they were just passing Lee Circle.

Mr. Wheeler drew out his watch with his free hand and murmured an apology. "Thanks to your kindness I shall just about make my train."

"Don't thank me," said Chloe demurely. "You have been an Adventure. It is very in-

teresting to find an Adventure on the way to one's début. I consider you a lucky omen, like a pin pointing away from one on the floor, or a horseshoe upside down. There, that will do, won't it?"

She surveyed his hand with critical satisfaction, her head a little on one side.

"Thank you, thank you very much," said Mr. Wheeler earnestly, then his glance caught a small gold shimmer against the white of the bandage, and he touched the shimmer with one finger. It was a pin of the sort commonly used to fasten babies' frocks, a very little thing and of no considerable value, but Mr. Wheeler regarded it with dismay.

"Really!" he begged. "You mustn't do that."

"It's the merest little thing," said Chloe sweetly—"why not?"

"But you must have had it pinning something on your frock."

"Just an end of lace."

In her corner of the limousine, Mrs. Malone, who had acquired a slight headache from the jar of the collision, closed her eyes and leaned back with a suggestion of weariness. The perfume of the valley lilies was heavy, and she

held them away from her face. Inwardly she reflected, not without relief, that five minutes more would bring the Union Station and the dispatch of Mr. Courtenay Wheeler into the great outside.

Meanwhile, Mr. Wheeler, looking into Chloe's dark eyes, and seeing Chloe's flushed, radiant face against the soft dimness of the cushions, suffered an impulse. It may be that the sweetness of the valley lilies went to his head, or the rhythmic splash of the rain on the limousine windows. In any case, he was a young man not accustomed to impulses, so took this one, head-on.

"If I'm going to be an Adventure," he offered quietly, "I want to be remembered. Please pin the end of lace, or whatever it was, with this."

He detached from his waistcoat a small square pin of gold and black enamel, and put it in Chloe's reluctant fingers.

"Shall I?" asked Chloe, for once startled into a sort of little-girl frankness. It lent an appealing shyness to her red-rose pride.

"If you please," said Mr. Courtenay Wheeler, altogether deferentially.

Chloe looked at the pin and said aloud the three Greek letters it stood for.

"That's Northern," she added.

"Massachusetts," said Mr. Wheeler. "Please put it on before I go."

Chloe put it on with a dignified recklessness. She looked out of the window and saw that the Union Station was now only two blocks away.

"I'm an entomologist." Mr. Wheeler, on the full tide of impulse, swept the salient facts of his existence to her feet. "I've been doing some work on the boll weevil at one of your experiment stations down here, and I'm getting back to Boston now. I'm a fairly desirable citizen. No reason why you need be nervous about wearing that pin, and it may remind you between dances of an Adventure—wasn't that what you called me?"

"Anyhow, I didn't call you an adventurer," said Chloe, with lashes deceptively lowered.

"Thanks for that," Mr. Wheeler told her gravely.

He turned to Mrs. Malone, to whom her daughter's by-play had been fortunately, or unfortunately inaudible, and made his adieux in the mother tongue.

"It is nothing," said Mrs. Malone graciously; "a small thing to do."

"Be careful of that cut," Chloe put in judiciously, retrieving her flowers from her mother's arms. "It is so easy to infect a wound. Use lots of hot water and alcohol."

Mr. Wheeler listened with enormous respect.

"Thank you, ma'am," he said obediently. Then he picked up his bag as the limousine came to a stop before the station, and smiled down at Chloe with an uncommonly likable blend of humor and something warmer in his look.

"Exit the Adventure," he said. "I wish you a wonderful début and a world full of slaves."

Chloe touched her flowers to her cheek.

"I am almost sorry," she said softly, "that you are only an Adventure, and that I am never to see you again—you seem rather nice."

Mr. Wheeler gave his bag to a porter and paused a deliberate moment on the curbing, his hat in his hand.

"That," he observed at length, "is the very kindest and most gracious thing that anybody ever said to me. Thank you and—good night."

Then he really went.

On the way down Bourbon Street, Mrs. Malone observed that the curtain would probably have risen.

"But we have done a good deed, *Maman!*" objected Chloe virtuously. "Fancy, if that poor young man had missed his train!"

"Me," said Mrs. Malone somewhat pathetically, "I have no feeling for poor young men."

"Only as adventures," Chloe protested earnestly, "only as adventures, dearest! Did you think I had forgotten my millionaire? You little know your child."

She fingered the small square pin as she spoke, then caught her fingers away and folded them tightly around the stems of her flowers. Down the narrow street an orange glare, flooding the mist, proclaimed the old French Opera House. The faithful Boggs drew into place between a motor which crept too fast and a pair of portly bays who followed, too slow, and, for Chloe, the Comedy began.

CHAPTER III

WHEN Chloe, upon that night of her appearance as a débutante in the world which had knelt to her mother's shoe buckles and her grandmother's before her, descended from the limousine at the French Opera House on Bourbon Street, she was humming a tune.

Her mother observed it. Boggs observed it. And while the mother sighed, Boggs, the retainer, smiled. Boggs knew the tune. Mrs. Malone did not. She fancied it a snatch of Gounod, such was the spring-time magic of Chloe's soft rendering, but Boggs recognized beyond dispute—he had at once an ear and a heart—the simple strains of a popular melody.

Touching his leather cap, one hand on the limousine door, Boggs ventured an entirely respectful pleasantry.

“The gentleman sure did have to get out, Miss,” said Boggs, grinning fatuously. “A little closer and we'd a' took off the whole side

of his taxi. Get out and get under is right."

Mrs. Malone, to whom the latter phrase was Greek in any but a purely literal sense, drew Chloe gently away from the proletariat contact.

"It was unfortunate," she said, at once establishing, by the lift of her eyebrow and the soft chillness of her voice, the proper gulf between, "an unfortunate accident—but I am sure you did not make it—it was not your fault."

Boggs gaped momentarily and recovered himself.

"It has made us a little late perhaps," Mrs. Malone continued in her stiff pretty English, "but that also is not your fault—no. I do not blame you for it."

She added with a thoughtful brow: "You may come back for us at eleven," and ascended the steps of the Opera House.

Chloe followed meekly, almost demurely, but not before bestowing upon the injured Boggs a smile such as a queen may bestow upon the humblest, yet most deserving of her subjects.

Upon the way to the proscenium box, Mrs. Malone shivered.

"Indeed an unfortunate accident!" she repeated and whispered the name of a saint.

"But an Adventure, *chère petite*," objected Chloe.

"Me, I have no heart for Adventures," murmured the other. She added regretfully: "We are late—listen! Constantino!"

From the dusky heart of the house, a silver flame of sound shot up and hung upon the air.

Mrs. Malone stepped softly, she held up a hand for silence, and, still following, Chloe came lightly into the box of her godmother, Madame Lejeune, and slipped into a chair.

Not until the last note of *Celeste Aïda* had died away into an enraptured silence, did Madame Lejeune bestow upon the late comers other than an affectionate smile and the warning gesture of a small, heavily-ringed old hand. Then, however, she turned in her chair and put her fingers to her eyes.

"He makes me weep, that man!" she observed, with a delightful affectation of emotion. "While he sings, I am young—and I love. Chloe, my child, you are charming. The frock is ravishing. If I were a man, I should wish to devour you. The flowers—from whom? A poet, I perceive—lilies of the valley—the

simplicity of riches. Who is your poet, Chloe?"

"My lilies came from Rheames," said Chloe primly. She touched them with warm, caressing finger tips.

Madame Lejeune looked at Mrs. Malone, smiling a little, and Mrs. Malone smiled back with a suggestion of weariness.

"I selected them myself," she admitted. "I am her poet, cousin Amelie."

"You are well?" Madame Lejeune demanded sharply. "Your eyes seem too dark."

Mrs. Malone shrugged and laughed, leaning farther back into the shadow.

"Absurd!" she murmured, and Madame Lejeune, reassured, turned again to her god-child.

"Well, my little one, you are very happy to-night, eh?"

Chloe, who had been looking rather steadily at her mother, drew a long breath and smiled adorably.

"I feel," she said solemnly, "like a princess in a fairy tale, and you look like the fairy god-mother."

"So I do," the little old lady replied with equal gravity. "I observed it myself as I

dressed to-night. You like this gown, then."

"It looks," said Chloe, "like moonlight on a rose garden."

Madam Lejeune nodded and smiled. Above the careful rose and ivory of her beautiful old face, the white waves of her hair glinted into a structure of undeniable artistry. Her shoulders showed almost as smooth as a girl's although the gown of silver brocade bared them in a décolletage much more daring than Chloe's own. Pearls glowed lucently about the fairy godmother's neck. Her hands, those cruel telltales, small but veined and wrinkled with time, bore many rings. She folded her fingers lightly about the crook of an ebony cane which leaned against her chair, and her smile took on a certain malicious quality that was yet full of tenderness for the young thing beside her.

"All that the wicked world can give me, I need," she said. "Silver brocades and pearls, rings and silly feathers in my hair. As for you, my little one, a white frock, lilies in your arms, and they shall all be at your feet I promise you,—the poet and the rest of them."

"When they arrive, at my feet," Chloe commented calmly, "I must tell them to look at my

slippers; they cost us a frightful amount, those slippers. I should not like them to pass unnoticed."

"*Bébé*" jeered Madame Lejeune. "Any slipper is made of glass that has the foot of a pretty woman inside."

She put a lorgnon of exquisitely tarnished gold to her eyes and looked out across the box-rail into the great, dark murmurous shell that was the House.

"The Renaud girls are here to-night," she said with a delightfully confidential little air. "Three old roses toughly clinging to the parent stem. Regard them, little one; their smiles grow firmer every year. Mrs. Martin is in her box—with the British Consul's wife. She has done her hair in that mad new way with a curl smeared across one cheek. Her grandmother was a lady—you might not think it—I am sorry for Henri Martin. He has a young man with him, by the way, whom I wish him to present to you."

Chloe, who had been looking out into the shadowy horseshoe, her dark eyes wide with excitement, her soft cheeks flushed, her lips trembling to a smile, turned upon her god-mother the flash of a radiant glance.

"Is he a millionaire—your young man?" she inquired superbly.

Madame Lejeune's laugh was like a cracked silver bell.

"*Mais enfin!* Is he a millionaire—my young man? You do not ask is he a poet—or an artist—or even a lover? Why is that, little one?"

Over the green and white of her valley lilies Chloe lifted daring eyes. Her youth shone in the tarnished magnificence of the box like a pearl on a dusty red velvet cushion.

"I shall have no time for poets—or artists," she said. "Perhaps not even for lovers. I intend to marry a millionaire so that my mother can have her breakfast in bed every morning."

Madame Lejeune laughed again delightedly, but Mrs. Malone, who had been sitting still and rather pale, put out a protesting hand. She sounded very tired and somehow uneasy.

"Chloe! They will not know if you jest—"

"I do not jest," Chloe assented calmly. The little tinge of French that always colored her speech with her mother grew clearer.

"One sees—it is necessary that I make this my career."

"Oh, my little one!" laughed Madame Lejeune, with a scrap of a lace handkerchief against her lips. "This is delicious! *Eh bien*—if I say that he is a millionaire—my young man?"

"Then bring him hither!" retorted Chloe, with a lift of the chin and a sudden impish glimmer of the big eyes that were sparks to the old lady's tinder.

Mrs. Malone was silent after a sigh and one futile syllable.

"You are Dennis Malone's child," said Madam Lejeune at last, tapping her lorgnon against the back of one tiny hand. "That sees itself."

"I am my mother's child too," Chloe asserted jealously, "aren't I, *chère petite*?"

Mrs. Malone's answering murmur was hardly speech.

From the flaring line of the footlights arose a hiss and a thud. The curtain had fallen on the first act. Lights went up all over the house.

"And *Celeste Aïda* was all I heard—absolutely—" cried Chloe in startled regret.

"I loathe *Aïda*—all noisy tunes and kings in petticoats. If it had been something worth

listening to, I should have seen that you listened, my little one," Madame Lejeune assured her calmly. "We receive now. Why has not Verdi written the March of the Young Men? Positively they sit frozen, those Renaud girls. Not a husband between them. Doubtless they burn candles to St. Anthony, too, poor dears."

"Do you think—do you think that any one will come to talk to me?" begged Chloe. Her eyes were brilliant with nervousness.

"Do not look so hungry—and it may be that two will come."

Madame Lejeune regarded her godchild teasingly. Suddenly the beautiful old face softened and warmed. The old lips trembled for a moment.

"If I were a man," said the old lady fiercely, "by the nine gods that are no more, *I* would come and talk to you!"

"And I should be so proud of your coming that I would turn up my nose at the king," said Chloe adorably.

There was a step at the back of the box—two steps—then three. Against the light three figures loomed,—not Galahad nor Hercules, yet masculine: black and white as to gar-

ments, unbelievably smooth as to hair and flatteringly eager as to smile.

"Ah!" said Madame Lejeune. The exquisite and gracious hauteur of her tone gave you instant vision of Versailles—powdered curls and rendezvous by moonlight.

"Ah, Doctor Despard! Without you it would not be the first night at the Opera. Mr. Charpentier, is it not? And Mr. Jumel. This is very charming."

From her chair as from a throne, Madame Lejeune controlled the moment, enormously enjoying its freshness.

"Marie!"

Mrs. Malone leaned forward, smiling faintly.

"I think you know Doctor Despard—and Mr. Jumel? May I present Mr. Charpentier, Mrs. Malone?"

Mr. Charpentier bowed rather deeply. It was the depth of his bow momentarily amusing Madame Lejeune's eyes which covered from the old lady Mrs. Malone's curious silence.

The great moment remained.

"To-night," said Madame Lejeune regally, "my little girl comes out into the world. I permit you to welcome her, gentlemen!" She

named them to Chloe with stately effect, and Chloe, sitting like a princess in a fairy tale, with her valley lilies in the crook of her arm, her eyes deep with happiness, smiled, and gave her hand, and held her head high, and said to herself, behind sweetly curling lips:

"Steady, my dear! They say the same thing to every one of you! Steady!"

There was something back of the glory of those eyes, after all.

So the *entr'acte* passed. And there were others who came to welcome Chloe, a quite satisfactory stream of others, but the lights went out over the house, and the curtain rose again, and Madame Lejeune's young man who was also a millionaire had not come.

Chloe had rather looked for him. So had Madame Lejeune, but Mrs. Malone, sitting quietly in the background, beyond a murmured word and a pale smile, had favors for no one.

Once Chloe leaned to her with a whimsical little plea:

"*Chère p'tite*, you are enjoying my party?"

And Mrs. Malone answered softly, with a queer pause in the middle of her words.

"But it is—a wonderful party, Chloe."

That was all. It did not seem strange to the

girl that back of Madame Lejeune's silver brocade her mother sat silent. Madame Lejeune was always a little overwhelming, and Mrs. Malone very often silent.

It was after the third scene, to which Chloe had really listened, as it happened, that the young man who was also a millionaire eventually came, brought by that Henri Martin for whom Madame Lejeune was so sorry because his wife wore a curl across her cheek.

"Madame Lejeune," said Mr. Martin—he was sadly bald and wore no curls, across his cheek or otherwise—"this is for me the greatest pleasure of the evening; the whole horseshoe is talking of your *débutante*."

"*Imbecile!*" said Madame Lejeune indulgently.

Mr. Martin drew back a little and laid his hand upon the arm of the tall young man who stood beside him.

"Dan," said Mr. Martin, "I make you my debtor for life. Madame Lejeune may, if you please her sufficiently, present you to Miss Malone."

Madame Lejeune smiled thoughtfully.

"Mr. Kinloch, is it not?"

Mr. Kinloch replied in a deeply pleasant

voice that it was. He had friendly eyes, and his lips were firm, if the merest trifle too full. A rather startling impression of youth and cleanliness emanated from him. His hair, obviously proof against insistent brushings, was red and curly.

"I shall be awfully happy," he said without embarrassment, but equally without undue assertiveness, "if I may meet Miss Malone."

Some moments later, having met both Miss Malone and Miss Malone's mother, he drew up a chair and with a look for permission that was not altogether humble, seated himself just where the sapphire velvet of Chloe's coat, draped across the back of her chair, might touch his arm. Mr. Martin tactfully engaged Madame Lejeune. Like most of his race, he felt his obligations.

CHAPTER IV

"I WANTED to meet you," said Mr. Kinloch, when Chloe first looked at him fairly. "I've been watching you all the evening from the Martin box."

"How nice!" Chloe observed. She added, lifting her lashes slowly, "and how awfully impertinent!"

"Wasn't it?" agreed Mr. Kinloch untouched.

When Chloe smiled, he continued evenly: "I don't suppose you mean that. Women like to be looked at—with admiration."

"You may look at me, if you like; I don't mind," said Chloe, "but you are not to tell me that you look."

"Why not?" he inquired practically.

"Because if I am conscious of your looking, I cannot look as well as I otherwise should."

Mr. Kinloch smiled, displaying strong white teeth.

"You don't even talk like the rest of them," he commented frankly.

"I should—to most men," said Chloe. She looked at him, smiling serenely. With all her youth, her utterly unblemished freshness, she had, subtly, a little air of garnered experience. She had had it in her cradle which, of course, Mr. Kinloch could not know.

"No," he said, "you are different."

"So," said Chloe, "are you."

They liked each other warmly from that moment.

"To prove that I've been watching you—I'll tell you—you came just as our stout friend started in on his first real tune. You were late, weren't you?"

A sudden color flamed in the girl's soft cheeks. A spark lit in her eyes.

"Did you ever hear of a man named Courtenay Wheeler?" she demanded abruptly.

"Scientist chap?"

"Then you do know him!" Chloe exclaimed.

"He's been down here working on the boll weevil. Yes, I should say I do know him. I stand to lose quite a bit unless a bug he thinks he can find gets busy enough to kill a lot of other little bugs. Why?"

"Tell me about him," said Chloe imperiously. "The boll weevil—then you must own cotton somewhere."

"A plantation or two up around Natchez."

"And he's working for you?"

"No—oh, no! Wheeler's with the Government. He's been working at the Louisiana station. Experiment station, you know. But he's a keen entomologist—quite a reputation for a young man—and he seems to think he has a chance in the matter of finding something to put the boll weevil out of business. You're not interested in all that?"

Chloe made an impatient little gesture with her left hand.

"You like him—Mr. Wheeler?"

"Hardly know him personally," said Mr. Kinloch, crossing his knees and looking thoughtful. "He's a queer duck. Lots of brain but no temperament. Now I've got an awfully interesting temperament. One of the rarest in captivity. Goes with my hair." He smiled engagingly.

"What do you mean—no temperament—about Mr. Wheeler?" Chloe insisted ruthlessly. Mr. Kinloch sighed.

"Women," he explained. "He doesn't like

'em. I tried to take him round a bit; but he freezes solid at sight of a ruffle. No use for the hand that rules the world."

Chloe fingered a little black and gold pin that held an end of lace on her gown. She smiled, with lowered eyes.

"What, if I may ask," inquired Mr. Kinloch interestedly, "has Mr. Wheeler to do with your late arrival? Do you know him well? You weren't supposed to know anything so dangerous as a man before to-night, were you?"

"We ran into him on the way down," said Chloe sweetly. "That is, he tried to pass us on the Avenue—it was very slippery—and my chauffeur, Boggs, quite accidentally ran into him and took a wheel off his taxi."

"You don't say so!" chuckled Mr. Kinloch.

"We had never met him; it was really very awkward," Chloe continued with dignity. "And he was on his way to a train. So in common decency we had to take him to the depot." She added, after a reminiscent pause: "That made us a little late."

"Most good deeds do," said Mr. Kinloch.

"But I rather liked him," Chloe objected. "One can't help liking a man a little, after one's just taken a wheel off his taxi, and I did

not notice that he froze solid, as you express it—”

She added, after another star-eyed silence: “His hand was cut, and I tied it up.”

“Some people,” said Mr. Kinloch grimly, “have all the luck. If I ever cut my hand, the best that happens to me is a little collodion!”

“Sh!” said Chloe. “The curtain’s going up.” She set her lips primly, but her eyes shone.

“I’m going to stay,” Mr. Kinloch announced in a defiant whisper.

“I am quite sure my godmother will be charmed,” said Chloe demurely.

Madame Lejeune was gracious, at least. She said good-by to Mr. Martin and conceded Mr. Kinloch’s remaining in a single smile of various meanings.

“No one is to speak to me,” she commanded. “I wish to hear at least one scene, to-night, and this will do as well as any.”

At the end of that scene, however, she gathered her wrap of gray velvet and her wonderful blue fox furs together and announced her departure with a decision which admitted of no protest.

“In my days of rose color, I stayed always to the end,” she said. “I adored the suspense.

The tenor's undying death pangs were romance itself to me. Now, I suffer torture only for fear Ammeris will crash through the top of the tomb upon the poor man's head. She is fatter, that woman, than even a soprano has right to be. Marie, *ma chère*, good night. My little one! Mr. Kinloch, you may see me to my carriage—"

Upon his return some ten minutes later, Mr. Kinloch made his way through a pleasing assemblage of masculine callers and pre-empted once more the chair behind Chloe. He stayed, without question, and with a not un-likable assumption of a friendly right to be there.

"Send me away if you get tired of me," he suggested cheerfully.

Chloe looked at him and smiled with untroubled audacity.

"When I find you tiresome, I will send you away," she assured him.

She was very happy that night. She looked out into the glittering horseshoe, and the women's gowns made for her eyes a garden. There were jewels in the horseshoe, but they were only dew on the garden. The music that rose vibrant and throbbing from the orchestra sent little shivers of ecstasy along her nerves.

The eyes of the man at her elbow were kind. They might, for Chloe, have been the eyes of the world. The scent of her valley lilies brought vaguely back the eyes of the other man whose hand she had bound up. The other man's eyes had been kind as well, but that, said Chloe to herself, was merely Adventure. You are lucky if you have Adventure to spice your dreams. Life itself must be something different.

Life *is* different.

In the shadows of the box, as the curtain rose upon the lovers entombed, Mrs. Malone swayed in her chair and uttered a tiny moan.

"Chloe," she said faintly, "I am sorry—" the rest was in French, gasping and half-uttered.

Chloe sprang up blindly, dropping her flowers upon the floor, and knelt beside her mother's chair.

"She is ill," she said after a moment, turning a white and frightened face to Kinloch's questioning eyes. "She is suffering—very much—what shall I do? I never saw her like this before."

Mrs. Malone, her head lying weakly against

her daughter's shoulder, moved trembling lips in a barely audible whisper.

"Take—me—home."

"Yes, *chère petite*—at once! Can you—can you stand?" begged Chloe, fighting the tears out of her voice.

On the stage, *Rhadames* besought his love in liquid music.

"Let me," said Kinloch. He put his arm about Mrs. Malone and supported her slender weight.

"Get your wraps," he said gently to Chloë, who stood trembling beside him, "and your mother's— and let me take you home at once. That's the best thing. Don't be frightened. Just come very quietly. The house is dark."

Chloe put on her blue velvet coat with fingers that stumbled and laid her mother's wrap tenderly about the drooping shoulders. She left her lilies lying on the floor and never thought of them again.

"I am ready," she said.

At the door of the Opera House to which Kinloch half led, half supported Mrs. Malone, a word to the doorman brought a big gray limousine, soft-cushioned and silent.

Kinloch looked to Chloe for directions.

Crouched in a corner of the machine, with her mother's head once more upon her shoulder, she gave them, and the car slid off along the narrow street, its windows streaked with rain.

When Kinloch carried Mrs. Malone up the stairs of the quiet, dark old house on Dufossat Street, she fainted in his arms, but she opened her eyes, when he laid her at Chloe's speechless gesture down upon the bed beside the great-great-grandmother's mirror, and moved her lips weakly for a moment before she could speak.

"Chloe—" she said at last—"like this all evening—a doctor—my poor baby!"

Chloe went down upon her knees beside her bed, setting her teeth upon a sob, but not before she had whispered chokingly, in answer to Kinloch's look.

"Telephone—next door—"

She was up from her knees and bathing her mother's white face with pungent French cologne long before Kinloch came back. He was gone twenty minutes, and the doctor, a small thickset man with a pointed brown beard, was with him when he returned. Kinloch named him hurriedly—a name that spoke in New Orleans for itself.

"I took the liberty of going after you, Doctor," he said at the foot of the stairs, "because Mrs. Malone seemed to need you rather badly. If you'd like me to go for a nurse—"

"I'll let you know when I come down," said the doctor.

He looked at Kinloch a little curiously. Kinloch's name also at that time spoke for itself—chiefly in syllables of six figures and over.

"I take it I can go right up," said the doctor.

Chloe met him at the head of the stairs. Her eyes were horribly frightened, but she had steadied her lips somehow. She still wore her white and silver gown, but she had changed her wonderful slippers for a shabby little pair of red felt shoes with black fur tops,—the sort of thing you see in the magazines, for old ladies. The wonderful slippers had sounded too gaily upon the naked floor.

After all, Kinloch did not go for a nurse.

Doctor Macklin came down in half an hour,—such are the margins of life and death,—and said that Mrs. Malone would do very well now, but that a heart like hers ought not to be subjected to removing wheels from taxicabs, and

that he would be back in the morning. It was then half-past twelve.

At twenty-five minutes before one, Chloe stood in the dim and draughty hall, lit by a single gas jet, and said good night to Mr. Kinloch, whose red hair had something the suggestion of dull embers against the shadow.

"I can never forget," she said—she still wore the white and silver gown and the incongruous, little old-lady shoes—"how good you've been to us. But for you, my mother might have—" she dared not say the word. Her eyes filled. "If you ever want anything of me," she finished recklessly, "ask it—that's all!"

Mr. Kinloch held the hand she gave him. His friendly eyes were all at once on fire with a more than friendly flame.

He said briefly: "Don't be too generous. I might take you up some day."

Chloe suddenly shivered a little. The hall was none too warm.

Mr. Kinloch saw the shiver. He released her hand lingeringly.

"Good night," he said, and his eyes were only friendly now, "I'm a brute to keep you talking."

Chloe let him go, but when his hand was on



"If you ever want anything of me," she finished recklessly,
"ask it — that's all!" Page 48.

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the door knob, she called him back, in a frantic whisper.

"Oh!" she said, "Oh! If you *could* see B-Boggs? I forgot all about him."

"Great Scott—your chauffeur!" said Mr. Kinloch.

Chloe dropped her eyes. Then she broke into an hysterical little laugh. Then she drew herself up to her full height, some five foot four or thereabouts.

"He isn't mine," she said royally. "I only played he was. Will you 'phone the Washburn Garage for me, please? He belongs there."

"I will, your Highness," said Mr. Kinloch. He bent his red head and touched his lips to the hand that stretched out to him. He did not laugh—even with his eyes.

Which is possibly why, when the door had closed behind him, Chloe stood dreaming one soft mysterious moment before a faint voice called her, and all dreams forgotten, she went swiftly up the stairs.

CHAPTER V

THE winter that Chloe Malone came out, the cotton market went soaring, and it was in New Orleans a very gay season indeed. Functions were never so elaborate, and the sterner if sadder sex paid the piper without a question. Thousands of dollars were spent upon a carnival which flamed briefly along the city streets and vanished into darkness. Wherever you turned, you met the easy smile of unearned increment, the friendly hand that toils not neither does it spin. In the newspapers, vague allusions to a well-deserved prosperity starred the editorial page—the South was coming into its own again—Louisiana emerging from the shadows—King Cotton victorious.

Chloe was maid at three carnival balls and queen of one. Her mother's star-shaped diamond brooch paid for the first three gowns, and Madame Lejeune gave Chloe the fourth.

"To be Queen of Comus," said Madame Lejeune, "is an honor; for a silly young thing like you it is veritably a decoration. We must not on such an occasion neglect ourselves. What do you say, my little one? Brocade—or chiffon? White, of course—something chic, but very innocent."

Chloe's look of radiant youth dimmed a little beneath a shade of bitterness.

"Calico," she suggested somberly, "or cheese-cloth; I could afford that, couldn't I? Then I shouldn't be eating up mother's rings and pins and things, one by one, and I shouldn't be—"

With the tips of two wrinkled little fingers Madame Lejeune struck her godchild smartly on one velvet cheek.

"In *my* young days," she answered with exaggerated annoyance, "a girl was not so free of her tongue. We know what is best for you—your mother and I. If you do not go out, you will never meet the people whom we wish you to know. And if you are not gowned as you should be, no one will look at you; let me tell you that, my little one."

"You mean," said Chloe, her dark eyes queerly bright, "that I can repay you both by

—by making a good marriage—I know it.”

Mrs. Malone, who sat by the window, her head bent above some lacy garment of the mal-content's, lifted a shocked face and put out a protesting hand.

“Chloe!” she said nervously, “that sounds so hard—so *désenchantée*.”

But from her chair in the center of the room, —the three were sitting in Chloe's bedroom, the room with the great-great-grandmother's mirror,—Madame Lejeune uttered the final word.

“It sounds,” she said, clasping both hands about the crook of her ebony cane, “deliciously sensible. Your mother, my little one, would like you to make eyes at love while remembering that it is the most outrageous of luxuries, and only the sparrows in the road can honestly afford it. Let me tell you, if you marry wisely, you have something that will last—and that is not moonshine. Marie! only the truth now! Should you like her to marry a poor man?”

“It would break my heart,” said Mrs. Malone simply. She went on darning a rent in the lace of the petticoat she held, with deft, but trembling fingers.

“You were not made for poverty.” The old lady eyed Chloe keenly. “There are women

who can stand it, but not you. Come and kiss me. Have you had your exercise to-day?"

"The funny part of it is," said Chloe, when she had kissed her godmother's cheek, "that I agree with you—absolutely. You are urging me to do what I decided long ago. I shall never love anybody,—any man, that is,—but I shall *like* my husband very much, indeed—" she added on a poignant afterthought, "if he is not too stout—or bald."

"Riches," Madame Lejeune chuckled wickedly, "do sometimes seem to thicken the waist line and polish the skull. *Bien!* Even then—"

But Chloe flung her a kiss from the doorway and went singing into another room.

When the queen's gown came home, she worshipped before it, being only twenty, and wore it on the night of the great ball with the loveliest grace in the world.

That was a wonderful night in a winter of wonderful nights. The king, who sat beside Chloe upon the mimic silver throne, and whose white velvet tunic was ever so slightly convex above the road to his heart, forgot that in clear cold daylight he was a bank president; forgot that he possessed and properly loved a thin,

middle-aged wife; forgot that all the world was not young, lad, nor every goose a swan; and danced dim, smutty spots on to the toes of Chloe's silver slippers. Chloe herself forgot that there were any flowers in the world but rosy orchids; or any music in the world but the sighing of fiddles and flutes; or any faces in the world but the dear, wonderful, radiant faces that smiled into hers from boxes and horseshoe and *loges grillées*, and even down adoringly from the topmost gallery, for the ball was danced in the old French Opera House, as most carnival balls in New Orleans are. It really began to seem as if that Opera House were going to play a considerable part in Chloe's life.

The wonderful night, however, came to an end, and at three in the morning of Ash Wednesday, sitting rather like a little girl and not like a queen at all upon the side of her mother's bed, Chloe, in her long, white nightgown, with her black hair hanging softly about her shoulders, imparted certain significant information in a carefully colorless voice.

"Mr. Kinloch," said Chloe, "asked me to marry him—to-night."

Mrs. Malone raised herself upon one elbow

in the bed. Her pretty faded face grew tense with anxiety and pale with suspense.

"Chloe! You—"

Lacing her fingers together and fixing her eyes upon the carving of the bedpost, Chloe continued her report.

"I told him I didn't know—that he would have to wait. I—I like him, rather."

"He seems desirable," said the mother faintly.

"Of course he has red hair," said Chloe bravely, "and it curls—but his smile is nice—"

Her own smile wavered slightly.

"He could give you everything." Mrs. Malone's hand went furtively to her heart.

"Yes?" said Chloe. "Everything?"

It was distinctly a question.

"And he is a good young man—your god-mother says—"

"Good and kind and very, very rich," said Chloe, scuffing the toe of her bedroom slipper along the edge of the rug. "Of course, I knew she was watching him—"

Mrs. Malone drew the bed covers closer about her.

"I think she hoped—" she murmured.

"Ye-es, I rather hoped myself," Chloe ad-

mitted cynically. Then her woman-of-the-world composure broke and vanished utterly. She slipped down upon her knees beside the bed and flung her arms around her mother's neck, hiding her face in that soft refuge that had known alike the tragedy of her first broken doll and the ecstasy of her first long skirt.

"I couldn't!" she sobbed, in a little tempest of shamed excitement. "I just couldn't—that's all; I couldn't—I couldn't! My hands got cold; I trembled all over. It—it was horrid of me, wasn't it? He's—he's a terribly nice man, *chère petite!* there isn't a girl I know who isn't c-crazy about him; but when it came to—to saying what he wanted me to say—"

"My baby!" said the soft mother lips against the dusky hair. The two clung wordlessly together.

After a time Chloe drew herself free.

"I ought to be whipped," she said and laughed shakily.

"You shall never marry anybody you do not want," her mother told her with deep emotion.

Chloe drew a long breath and wiped her eyes on the hem of the sheet.

"Oh, I'm going to *want* to marry him," she returned. "It's just a question of time.

Only, I lost my nerve, somehow, when he asked me. It—it seemed like tying my hands, somehow—to marry—not just him—any one at all. It seemed—like throwing away—you know—freedom— and being young—”

Naked as a sword blade, the truth slipped from between Mrs. Malone’s unwilling lips.

“Love has no care for all of that.”

Chloe stood up, folding her arms across her breast, and looked down at her mother with a sudden impish grin, still a trifle unsteadily.

“And when it’s too late, love is sorry it was so brave, eh?”

She had regained her incongruous little air of experience; she was all at once the elder of the two.

“Good night, darlingest, kiss your child!” she said sweetly, stooped for a moment above her mother’s bed, then turned off the gas beside the bureau, slipped through the doorway, and was gone.

There were flowers a few hours later from Mr. Kinloch,—orchids arriving at seven o’clock of a gray and ashen morning; but Mrs. Malone set the box aside and let Chloe sleep. The mother went about the house that day with a small smile touching her lips, her eyes hope-

fully brooding. She shook her head above the orchids with a little, wistful air of middle-aged envy for youth's extravagance. There had not been orchids when Dennis Malone came courting, but there had been roses—great red ones, sweet as summer. The sight and scent of a red rose sickened Mrs. Malone even now.

Later, there had been bills for those roses, and Dennis Malone had never cared for bills. He had not known how to meet them. Even before his death, in Chloe's small third year, the moonshine had faded, and with his death the sordid, pitiful battle for a decent existence had begun.

For Mrs. Malone the memory of that first impotent year of widowhood had never lost its edge. Accustomed to easy living, even to luxury, she had found herself, when her husband's affairs were settled, practically penniless. Like the engaging waster that he was, he had scattered not only her patrimony but his own, leaving for his wife and child, when all was said and done, only the affectionate goodwill of a large number of sympathetic acquaintances.

Mrs. Malone had made for herself and her child in the years that followed a living and a

home. Helpless, as most southern women of her generation were, she had yet, like Tommy, always found a way. There were specimens of her exquisite needlework in the trousseau of many a bride she never saw—many a baby she never handled. Also, one by one, she had spent the treasures of her heart. Some of the diamonds of Dennis Malone's courtship had been sold to pay for his daughter's schooling.

Into the insatiate hopper of poverty had gone, piece by piece, the years of Mrs. Malone's youth and the days of her freshness. Chloe, she was resolved, should never cut her feet along the same stony pathway her mother had trod. What Mrs. Malone had suffered, she had suffered and without ostentation, but the creed of her life was that Chloe should be different.

As for Chloe herself, when she opened her drowsy eyes at noon that day and her mother laid the box of orchids upon the bed beside her, she sniffed before she smiled.

"Takes a lot for granted, doesn't he, *chère p'tite*?" said Chloe.

"Are you—you to see him to-day?" Mrs. Malone inquired carefully. She added at once, lest Chloe think her eager: "I have choco-

late and brioches for you—out on the stove.”

“Brioches! Um-m!” said Chloe. She made a little, greedy noise in her throat. Brioches, in case you should not know, are a remarkably good sort of bun, crisp and sweet and peculiarly delectable with chocolate. On her way to the bathroom, Chloe remembered to add, “To-day? No—day after to-morrow, darlingest. Suspense is good for young men—for red-headed young men in especial, isn’t it?”

Mrs. Malone thought, if she did not say, that suspense, however good for red-headed young men, was rather wearing on tired mothers who felt their own hands giving and wanted to see another and stronger pair on the rope before letting go and peacefully slipping away with the current. She brought the chocolate and brioches and carried the orchids away to put them in water.

For Chloe, meantime, the golden haze of the wonderful night persisted. There was her queen’s gown, pearl-embroidered and pellucidly shimmering; there was the slender crescent of pearls that was the king’s favor; the little gold and enamelled pins that maskers had showered on her; one star-shining, perfect crescent of sapphires that had been Kinloch’s gift,

in his rôle of duke of the court. Less provocation has turned a pretty head before this.

Chloe swept aside her gauzy memories, gowned herself soberly enough in gray with a little gray hat and veil that obviously fore-swore the world, the flesh, and the devil, and went to church. That night she went to bed at nine and slept like a child.

Next morning Kinloch sent her violets and a little virginal, vellum-bound prayer book. He had seen her on the street and followed her to church at an anonymous distance. It was perhaps a doubtful method of attending worship but better than none at all. He sat behind her, discreetly, and the way in which her soft, black hair grew up from the back of her lovely neck aroused in him a wonderful reverence. He knelt when she knelt, and when she prayed he bent his head. It was as near as he could come and left him rather shamefaced, at that. He came out of the Church of the Little Jesus, as it is affectionately called, when she had left it, and before proceeding on his way, he cast furtive glances up and down the street. He might have been a conspirator instead of a sufficiently respectable young man under the uplifting and purifying influence of Woman.

Chloe never dreamed that he had followed her, but she liked the little prayer book and liked him for sending it. When on the next day, which was the day she was to see him again, he sent her red roses, she liked him for that, too. To a woman—and a young woman—and a woman who has not yet known love, a red rose is the heart-beat made manifest of that pleasing emotion.

Mrs. Malone, however, shivered the merest superstitious trifle at sight of the ardent blossoms; she had her reasons, as has been said.

CHAPTER VI

KINLOCH came early. Chloe had promised to see him at three, but at half-past two he was at her door, apologizing insincerely for his haste.

"You're all by yourself," he said gaily, when Chloe gave him her hand in the dim, high-ceilinged drawing-room. "Most girls would have made me wait a year—by way of punishment."

Chloe definitely released her hand, with a flicker of dusky lashes.

"By way of punishment," she said demurely, "you will not see my nicest frock which I expected to wear for you, and you will have to light the fire, which would have been burning nicely if you had come at the proper time."

Kinloch went down on his knees before the grate, fumbling for a match.

"Lighting fires," he offered after a moment, a little yellow flame scorching across the paper

as he spoke, "is one of the best things I do. I hope you've found that out. That all right?"

"Thank you," said Chloe. She did not look at him, but a clear color burned in her cheeks, and she smiled.

"As for the nicest frock," Kinloch got to his feet and stood looking at her with a very appealing warmth in his eyes. "That sounds good. If you were going to say no, you wouldn't put on your nicest frock to do it in, would you? You wouldn't turn the knife in the wound like that?"

"I might put on my nicest frock," Chloe objected, "to try and give you the nicest memory of me—even if I couldn't—"

"Don't say it," said Kinloch abruptly.

Chloe, for all her composure, was still new to the ways of men in love.

"Won't you sit down?" she asked stiffly.

She chose one corner of the old, green-covered sofa, and Kinloch took the other.

"I mean," he said coaxingly, "don't say anything you'll be sorry for."

"No?"

"Don't use snap judgment. It seems to me—it seems to me," said Kinloch with a touch of wistfulness that sat not badly on his bold,

honest eyes, "that I could make you pretty happy"

Chloe smiled, irresistibly and delightfully. She folded her hands on the lap of the little blue serge frock which Kinloch's premature arrival had left her no time to change and looked at him without evasion.

"I—as I told you the night of the ball," he continued, a slight husk of nervousness in his voice, "I—I'm pretty badly gone. You've got me all right—if you can see it that way; and when I think of what it would be like to do things for you—to give you things—Lord!" said Mr. Kinloch.

The fire sputtered and broke into a blaze. Little things about the room caught the light and glittered incongruously; a metal door knob, a small, brass vase on the table, the glass before an old-fashioned steel engraving of Charlotte Corday in Prison.

"It seems to me," said Mr. Kinloch, his red hair no less red in the firelight, "you must like me a little because—" his smile was more than ever engaging, "I like *you* so much. Don't you?"

In her corner of the sofa Chloe had sat very still, eyes big and dark and far away. Now

she came back from her meditations and twisted her slim little hands together.

"I like you," said Chloe frankly, "best of all the men I've met this winter."

"That means best of all the men you know, doesn't it?"

"Very nearly."

"Well, then—" said Kinloch triumphantly.

But Chloe put his encroaching hand gently away with fingers that would not be held.

"I'm going to be perfectly truthful with you," she said slowly.

There was more than mere immature idealism in her look, a sort of eager fairness that was characteristic of her in her moments of crisis.

"I've always thought," said Chloe, "that I should want to be perfectly truthful about anything like this, and I believe I can—if you don't mind listening—"

"I'd listen to the multiplication tables if you were saying them," Kinloch returned ardently.

Chloe smiled and shook her head at him.

"Well, I'm not—and I can't—above four times four—but this other is serious—"

"I'm listening," said Kinloch.

Chloe clasped her hands together tight.

"I've never been in love," she began, "and I don't believe I ever shall be."

"All girls say that," Kinloch interrupted, with a respectful grin.

"I mean," said Chloe, "I don't let go of myself easily. You're not taking me very seriously, Mr. Kinloch, are you?"

Kinloch sobered on the instant.

"I beg your pardon, my—"

"But," said Chloe quickly, "I've always believed that most of the unhappy marriages came from too much love. Do you see what I mean? People expecting too much of each other, and each being too bitterly disappointed when the other fails. If you don't care so terribly—you can't be so badly hurt." Her face glowed with earnestness. "Now—it has always seemed to me that just liking somebody immensely would be a better foundation for marriage than the ordinary, lose-your-head, swept-off-your-feet sort of love. Just liking, you could be such wonderful friends—and there wouldn't be any glamour to wear away, you see? Because what you started out with would have been real and lasting."

"Then you don't believe in love?" asked Kinloch indulgently. He looked at Chloe as a

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child of twelve years looks at a child of five playing with blocks and making words with them.

"I believe in a sort of a wonderful adventure," said Chloe, with a trace of exquisite shyness, "that's all."

"And you like me best of all the men you know?"

"Of all the men I really know—yes."

"Do I—" Shyness smote Kinloch in his turn, a shyness that the men who called him brother would never have recognized. "Do I come anywhere near the sort of man you think you'd like to marry—you honest little angel?"

Chloe drew patterns on the lap of her frock with a chilly forefinger.

"Because if I do," he finished ardently, "I'll make you love me, all right. Just give me my chance."

A little smile curved Chloe's lips.

"You've come back in a circle to the place we started from; you don't argue with me at all."

"Well, I respect your thinking that way," Kinloch admitted frankly, "and isn't that about as much as you could ask of a man in love with you, Chloe?"

"No—no! Please!" cried Chloe hurriedly. She leaned away from his encircling arm.

"You said you liked me best," he reminded her relentlessly.

"That doesn't mean anything—yet!" Chloe protested.

"But it will—some day," said Kinloch.

Their eyes met and held; in the man's, pursuit; in the girl's, flight, but a flight that was purely instinctive and that, fleeing, looked over its shoulder. Suddenly Chloe stood up, Daphne at bay, the color fluttering in her cheeks. Kinloch was beside her in an instant, her hands tight in his, his red head stooping to her dark one.

"Chloe! You love me now! Just a little—"

But Chloe stood her ground. She twisted her hands free and put them behind her. Her eyes softened, but her chin was steady.

"You must *not* do that!" she said imperiously.

"All right—I'll wait," said Kinloch. He put his hands in his pockets and moved away from her. At an inconsiderable distance, he turned.

"Say we're engaged," he begged.

"But we're not."

"Some day—"

"That isn't now."

"You won't even look at me."

"Why, yes, I will," said Chloe and lifted her face. It was not her fault that youth and propinquity and the love of love leagued suddenly against her. After all, had not her mother's eyes turned wistfully at his name, had not her godmother frankly urged him? What was a girl's shy instinct against the wisdom of her world? And Kinloch's smile was curiously compelling; some unknown flame burned deeply in his look.

Chloe heard his step upon the floor; she felt his arms about her, saw in a haze, through drooping lashes, the conqueror's look upon his face and felt upon her own, for the first time in all her twenty years, the touch of alien lips.

"Don't," she heard herself say, in a small shaken voice. "I don't like to be kissed!" But her soul was at the moment demanding breathlessly of itself whether she had liked it or not.

"Say we're engaged," insisted Kinloch, close to her ear, "my little—"

And Chloe said it rather hurriedly. She



"Don't," she heard herself say, in a small shaken voice.
Page 70.

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had a vision of her mother's face while she said it and a not unpleasing feeling as of one conferring the heavens upon the earth, for which Kinloch was immediately responsible.

"Some day," he announced exulting, "you are going to love me as much as I love you."

"Yes?" said Chloe, flushed and mocking.

She sent him away after he had measured her finger for the ring, and she did not allow him to kiss her again, engaged or no.

At the door, to which she accompanied him, her hand a shy reluctant thing in his, they met the postman.

"Good day!" said the postman brightly. He was a small, weazened person with spectacles and the endearing smile of an Irish terrier, and he had carried Chloe's letters for so many years that he felt almost a landed interest in her correspondents.

"You're in luck to-day, Miss Chloe! Three for you and none for nobody else."

"Two of 'em bills," Chloe retorted ungratefully. She bestowed an affectionate smile upon the spectacles.

"Thank you, Mr. Timson."

"Not a 'tall," said Mr. Timson politely, and passed on his way with his bag of Fate. The

next letter in his hand carried word to a widow-woman that her son had gone on his last hike by reason of a naked and homely little savage squatting on his heels in the damp of a Philippine jungle, but Mr. Timson wotted nothing of that. To the widow-woman as she opened the door to his whistle, he said cheerfully:

"Here we are—from foreign parts again. That's a great boy of yours. Never forgets his mother!"

As for Chloe, when Kinloch had gone, much against his will, she came back into the big, dim room and sat down beside the fire with her mail. Her cheeks burned, and she put the back of one hand to them, nervously. One envelope she opened and threw into the fire with a little frown. It was an advertisement for shoes. The second bore the unmistakable stamp of account rendered. She laid it carefully aside. But the third was in a plain cover and a strong hand. Chloe tore it open with only a languid interest.

When she had unfolded the contents, her own face looked up at her, young and sweet and more than a trifle proud, from a newspaper clipping of the day before her wonderful night. There was a neatly scribbled sheet be-

side. She read it with a heart startled into syncopation.

Washington, D. C.

"My dear Miss Malone:

"I found this picture of you in a New Orleans paper to-day, and if you still remember a mere adventure I should like to make my compliments to the Queen of Comus. I have thought of you a great many times since you took the wheel off my taxi the night of your début, and I still treasure the handkerchief and the pin with which you tied up my hand on the way to the station. When I remember that you graciously allowed me to substitute my little, old Alpha Tau pin for your use, I am indecently proud. Did the Queen of Comus wear it, by any chance? I like to think she did. Don't disillusion me. And did the Queen carry valley lilies? I have seen you in several florist's windows by the simple process of coming unawares upon a pot of valley lilies in bloom. The correlation seems to be unusually strong.

"I am leaving here to-morrow on the long trail of a small but vicious bug of which you have probably never heard and in whom you would hardly be interested. I like bugs but I realize their unfitness to sit in the presence of valley lilies.

"Will you forgive the liberty I have taken in this letter.

"Very sincerely yours,

"COURTENAY WHEELER.

When Chloe had read the letter for the second time, she put it back in the envelope, then she folded the picture of herself and put that inside the envelope too, then she put the whole thing inside her blouse and sat forward, elbows on her knees, with her chin in her smooth little palm, her eyes on the toes of her shoes.

After a moment her left hand went quite unconsciously to the blouse of her blue serge frock and stayed there, absently fingering a little pin of black and gold enamel. Once Chloe smiled and once she frowned, but for the most part her face wore a look of what might best be described as a sort of concentrated reminiscence.

She was remembering a variety of things; a wet night with the arc lights flinging gold into all the puddles; a disabled taxi, on its haunches in the mud; a brown, steady hand with a cut across the back of it; valley lilies; a cool pleasant voice; the lights of the Union Station; then once more the slightly musty interior of the hired limousine; herself and her mother on

their interrupted way to that first night of the opera; her mother's nervous inflections—

“a ve-ry unfortunate accident—”

—and her own, largely audacious—

“—but an Adventure—*chère p'tite!*”

Chloe's fingers touched the little pin almost with tenderness. The Queen of Comus *had* worn it beneath a fold of tulle; for luck, say, even queens having their feeling for adventure.

In Chloe's fingers tingled a sudden desire for pen and ink. Sentences formed before her inner vision.

“She did wear your little pin—the queen—and now that there isn't any queen, *I* wear it. That *should* make you indecently proud. I am wearing it this afternoon, if you—”

But there the writing finger having writ, as it were, moved on, while the color burned across Chloe's face in a scorching tide. Her lips had remembered all at once, and her hands and her eyes. This afternoon had not begun with the postman's whistle. Upon the queen's white, pearl-embroidered gown the little pin had lain secure, but on the breast of the blue serge frock—

Across the room Kinloch's red roses made a

luring spot of color against the tarnished arabesques of the old-fashioned wall paper.

Life and its little sequences! They were proving rather difficult for Chloe to deal with—out of hand.

CHAPTER VII

WHEN Madame Lejeune was first told of Chloe's engagement to Mr. Kinloch, she sent for her godchild and received her in state in the splendid old drawing-room of the place on Esplanade Avenue, where pier glasses in frames of tarnished gilt reflected dimly ponderous bronzes and carpets of faded rose, and wonderful Dresden cupids wreathing impossible vases, and a great many other things—all of varying value in the eyes of a fickle public, which to-day adores Bougereau and to-morrow the "Nude Descending a Staircase."

Chloe came somewhat reluctantly. She was aware of certain unfledged questions lurking in the recesses of her own mind, and she knew the sharpness of the little old lady's eyes. Nevertheless, she made a presentable show of embarrassment and kissed the delicately powdered cheek presented to her.

"Well, my little one!" said Madame Lejeune.

"Ye-es?" said Chloe dutifully, and added with an unexpected flicker in her dark eyes: "You are looking very beautiful to-day; isn't that a new gown?"

"Why did you not bring Mr. Kinloch?" demanded Madame Lejeune untouched.

Chloe played with the orchids she wore and looked demure.

"Dan? Oh, I haven't seen him to-day."

"He sent you those flowers?"

"He sends them every morning."

"Very properly."

"But not very originally."

"He is charming."

"That goes without saying," murmured Chloe.

"Sit down, my little one," purred Madame Lejeune.

You might really have called the first inning over.

Chloe sat down in a chair of wonderfully carved mahogany, the arms of which ended in elephants' heads, with curled trunks, grotesquely alluring. She leaned her head in its small velvet hat back against the somber tracery of the chair's high back and laid her slim, pointed finger tips upon the elephants' fore-

heads. Her face, in the shadowy room, gleamed like a Cochet rose, but her eyes were wary.

"It is what we have most wished for, your mother and I," said Madame Lejeune after a moment, "it could not have been more pleasing to us."

"He seems to be pleased too," said Chloe sweetly.

Her godmother smiled. Upon that careful rose-and-ivory face smiles came and went infrequently, but with a gracious significance.

"And you—you are happy?"

Chloe smoothed the wrinkled mahogany of the elephant's brows.

"He—he is charming—he seems to like me—frightfully. Yes—I am happy. When I think of what I shall be able to do for mother, I am more than happy."

"*Bien!*" Madame Lejeune approved. "On the day that you marry, I give you my pearls."

"Oh—no!" cried Chloe. Her face softened into a little-boy grimace. "He will think I am being bribed." She opened and shut her hands with a suggestion of restiveness, then looked squarely into her godmother's eyes.

"I told him," she said, "that I didn't believe

in love—as a foundation for marriage. I do not.”

“Humph!” said Madame Lejeune, greatly amused. “At your age, I believed in love as a foundation for everything in the world.”

Chloe smiled the smile of youth’s superior wisdom.

“And now—what do you believe in now?”

“Not in so much as once I did,” admitted her godmother, a trifle grimly.

“You see!” said Chloe, “you are all like that, and I have thought it out for myself. I think the mistake lies in loving too much to begin with. I think just *camaraderie*—and understanding—and a very big liking—you see what I mean? It ought to make a more successful marriage. That is how I mean to marry.”

“You told him that?” inquired Madame Lejeune, her eyebrows rising.

“When he asked me to marry him,” said Chloe coolly.

Madame Lejeune stared and shook her head.

“I am glad,” she observed at last, “that I was young in my time, not yours. The men of to-day have no blood in their veins.”

“But you think I am right,” Chloe insisted, perplexed.

"A woman," said Madame Lejeune sardonically, "has no business to be right. Any man that breathed would resent it. She should always be wrong and always be willing to admit it."

Chloe laughed and shrugged.

"You're only playing with me."

"Come here," said Madame Lejeune; "come to me, my little one!"

When Chloe stood beside her chair, she caught the two, warm young hands in her small wrinkled ones, cool with the chill of age.

"I want you to be safe," she said tenderly, "but I want you to be happy as well; what is the little trouble I see in your eyes? It is of no use to lie to me, little rabbit."

Chloe stooped with an impulsive gesture and kissed the hands that held her.

"Nothing," she said. "Nothing at all—only—" she finished recklessly, "it—it makes me nervous—being engaged. That's all. I give you my word."

Madame Lejeune laughed, nodded her head, and folded Chloe's hands closely together between her own.

"Oh, la, la, la!" she scoffed. "And why?"

"I—I don't like to feel that anybody has a

right to me," said Chloe bluntly. "I like to be *free*."

"The disgusting American manner of expressing yourself," said Madame Lejeune. She frowned, but her eyes were soft. Not so far behind was Madame Lejeune's own youth that she had failed to understand her goddaughter's meaning. Also she knew that love may be a strain, and that you must not urge a willing horse too far. Now that the engagement was achieved, Madame Lejeune saw no reason why a brief separation on the part of the lovers might not be advisable, might not even serve a little to divert Chloe's mind and ease her taut emotions. She spoke soothingly therefore, having laid her wires beforehand.

"You are tired, *m'amie*. The season has been a very gay one. You have played too much. You need rest. I have been thinking."

"I can tell, only to look at you," said Chloe, fired with sudden excitement, "that it is something wonderful!"

"I am going to take you on a voyage to Belize. I have always," said Madame Lejeune reflectively, "desired to see the Botanical

Gardens at Belize. You will need a great many white gowns. Go home and tell your mother I shall dine with you to-night. I have passage already engaged, so it will be of no good her discussing it."

Chloe looked into the arrogant, wrinkled little face and laughed, her cheeks flushing splendidly.

"It sounds like a fairy tale," she breathed; then a sudden doubt touched her. "Mother! I'm not sure I ought to leave her—do you think—"

"I think it quite possible she needs a rest as well," said Madame Lejeune trenchantly. "Your going will give it to her. Have you any more questions—Madame la Princess—or do you accept my humble suggestion?"

So Chloe and her godmother went to Belize. They went on a clean, white-enamelled, brass-railinged steamer which bore the entirely appropriate name of *Fortuna*, and Mr. Kinloch parted from them with rebellious regret just as the gangplank was about to be withdrawn, having already seen to it that Chloe's stateroom was filled with flowers, books, and sweets, after the approved prescription of the lady who writes *Advice to Those in Love*.

At the last minute he wrung Chloe's hands,—they were standing in the shelter of a lifeboat with no one to see,—and his eager likable face flushed darkly.

"Don't stay too long," he said huskily. "I mean, of course, I want you to have a good rest, but I hate to think of this town without you. Honestly, Chloe, I get worse all the time. You'll have to buy a hoop and let me jump through for you some day. I'd do anything you asked. I'd like to show you just how much I do care—"

"You do show me in a hundred different ways, Dan," said Chloe softly. Her hands trembled a little in his. Her eyes were queerly wistful. "What shall you be doing while I'm gone?"

"Nothing much of anything," said Mr. Kinloch moodily. "A little polo, maybe—and I kick around the Exchange sometimes. Anything you want me to do, sweetheart?"

"Dig me a ditch," the girl demanded suddenly, "or make me a bridge, or find me something to kill the bugs on my roses." She did not laugh.

Around the corner of the lifeboat came a bellowing wail, the naturally mournful bass of

a pudgy officer in white duck assisted by a megaphone.

"All ashore that's going ashore!"

"Good-bye!" said Mr. Kinloch. "Good-bye, Chloe. You want to remember that—*I love you*—my beautiful!"

Chloe could not remember afterwards what she had said, or if she had said anything at all. She had put out her hand, and some one had passed, and Kinloch had not kissed her,—that much was clear. All that day, while the boat steamed down the sluggish brown reaches of the river between banks where willows leaned, quivering greenly, and occasional dogs yapped shrilly about occasional cabin doors, Chloe lay back in a steamer chair with Kinloch's face between her eyes and the horizon. She could not get his voice, with its undertone of husky tenderness, out of her ears. She had seen him, as the boat drew away, standing beside her mother on the dock. Next that tall figure, with the sun shining fairly on its uncovered thatch of red hair, her mother looked more than usually frail and small. But Chloe knew that afterwards her mother would be sent home in Kinloch's big gray car, and the knowledge brought its own satisfaction. Also, the youth in her

veins betrayed her to a certain thrilled response to Kinloch's ardor.

"Already you look better," commented Madame Lejeune at luncheon time.

"I feel like Aurora," said Chloe sedately.

That evening at six o'clock, the *Fortuna* crossed the bar and swung out into the Gulf of Mexico. The sky was as silken soft and rosy as the palm of a baby's hand. Long swells lifted the sea that deepened before the ongoing ship into a blue richer than many sapphires. There was a wind edged with the half-reluctant chill of March.

Chloe stood by the rail up in the bow, her hands in the pockets of a rough, dark coat, a corduroy tam-o'-shanter on her soft hair, and watched the stars come out. She had a magnificent sense of adventure that night, a feeling of riding forth into a not unfriendly world. Determinedly she put the thought of Kinloch away from her, even the thought of her mother; she wanted more than anything else to feel herself free, a knight-errant soul, unhampered by exigencies even by traditions. Fancies of her little-girlhood came crowding back. She began to dream with her eyes open, lifting her face to the wind. The queer sense

of irresponsibility that the sea bestows was strong upon her. Madame Lejeune had gone to her cabin with the first swell, and Chloe hugged to herself the feeling of aloneness that she possessed. The wireless crackled vaguely overhead, and a little splinter of new moon slipped into the sea. Chloe smiled to herself in the dusk. She kissed the tips of her fingers to the little moon.

When she had stood there only a little longer, a deck steward came to her with a narrow envelope in his hand and peered at her curiously, in apparent uncertainty as to her identity.

"This Miss Malone?"

"Yes," said Chloe pleasantly.

"Miss Chloe Malone?"

"Yes," she said again.

"I reckon this wireless must be for you, then," said the deck steward lingeringly, gave it into her hand, and departed, not without a faint suggestion of regret. He was a man of melancholy appearance, with a stubble of beard on his long pale face.

Chloe opened the envelope, a little startled, not altogether sure of herself. The scrawl read briefly:

"Sweet dreams. Good night. DAN."

For some little time Chloe stood turning the paper over in her hands. After all, her sense of freedom had been false. She sensed the pull of invisible threads, as one who walks blindly into cobweb and feels its elfin strain against his face.

"I think it was terribly sweet of him," she said to herself at last, and went down to her cabin and to sleep.

There were five days of perfect azure weather before the *Fortuna* came to Belize, and Chloe's cheeks in the interim took on a rosy bronze.

"I congratulate myself," said Madame Lejeune, "that I see what you need. Your mother will not know you."

"My mother never has," said Chloe mutinously. "You don't expect an angel to know a changeling." Nevertheless she missed her mother badly.

Belize, for all its tropic green and gold, was disappointing. The roses in the Botanical Gardens gave out an evanescent odor of decay. The sun was unduly hot, and the too white houses uncomfortably glaring.

"It feels like a sandy road in August—without any trees," Chloe decided. She was glad when the *Fortuna* lifted her anchor and went on her way once more.

"Any rose," said Madame Lejeune, "grows best in its own piece of earth. I should have known that. Who is the young man I saw you talking to at luncheon?"

"There is not an interesting man on the whole silly passenger list," said Chloe calmly. "I think you knew it when you picked out this boat; didn't you, really? You are not leading me into temptation. I know you, dearest."

"We arrive at Amoa to-morrow," said Madame Lejeune, fanning herself a little irritably, "and after that we go back to New Orleans—*grace à Dieu!* I am too old for the sea."

"You are not too old to be wise as the serpent," said Chloe sweetly, "and beautiful as a French marquise—and you know it."

Madame Lejeune nodded magnificently, her eyes pleased. She *was* beautiful, as a bit of carved ivory is beautiful, or a scrap of yellow lace, or anything else that is frail and fine and precious with years. She had been a siren in

her youth, and she was accustomed to say with a wicked glint in her ageing eyes:

“If I could only be eighteen again and know what I know now!”

Luckily she could not; luckily none of us can.

As for Chloe, she loved her godmother very much and believed in her delicate cynicisms not at all, seeing through to the ageless heart beneath.

CHAPTER VIII

IT was noon when they came to Amoa, and noon at Amoa is noon in the eye of the sun. Heat rose shimmering from the jade-green waters of the Caribbean and fell shimmering from the brazen pallor of the sky. There was a crescent of coral sand for beach, running back into a valley of lush greenness, and back of that, again, mountains rose stark against the sky.

When the *Fortuna* had dropped her anchor, a fleet of flat-bottomed clumsy boats put out at once from the beach, loaded to the water's edge with bunches of green bananas and steered by grinning brown natives very nearly naked, who gibbered like monkeys and sang in ecstatic minors as they worked.

Chloe, in the sheerest white she could achieve, leaned on the rail and watched the work of loading the enormous bunches into the *Fortuna's* hold.

"I should like to be a brown man," she said cheerfully, "and wear just a rag or two and carry bananas, but I think I shall never eat a banana again; I feel rather surfeited. Don't you, dearest? Just from looking at them."

Madame Lejeune, who had gone to sleep in her deck-chair, did not answer. She slept very peacefully, looking for all the world like a Nattier grown old over night, and she slept without opening her mouth, which is by some considered to be the hall-mark of an aristocrat.

So Chloe went back to her watching alone. She had met no one who interested her on the boat, and she was quite accustomed to amusing herself. Part of the time she sat in a corner and read *Tommy and Grizel* because she had read it only twice before and liked it exceedingly, and part of the time she listened with her eyes half shut to the singing negroes, but mostly she was idle—and thought idly.

About five o'clock when the heat had lessened to a gentle glow, the ship's doctor, who was a harmless young man and engaged to a girl in Mississippi, came and asked Chloe if she would like to go ashore with him.

"There isn't much to see," he said honestly,

"just a few huts and an old Spanish fort, but it might amuse you."

Chloe said she thought it would. Because Madame Lejeune had gone down to her cabin, Chloe merely caught up her panama and preceded Doctor Black over the side of the *Fortuna* without further question. She was always hoping for Adventure, and Madame Lejeune had ideas of her own, with which Chloe's adventurous leanings sometimes clashed.

They went in to the beach in one of the flat-bottomed boats, sticky from the fruit it no longer carried and picturesquely slow. Doctor Black sacrificed a spotless silk handkerchief for Chloe to sit on, and Chloe despised herself for observing that it was not linen.

When the flat-bottomed boat grounded, Doctor Black lifted Chloe to the beach, getting his immaculate white shoes very wet as he did so, and Chloe was in Amoa.

"I feel," she said gravely, "as if I ought to sing something, it looks so like the setting for a remarkable aria; but all I can think of is *Dixie*. How would that do?"

"I didn't know you sang," Doctor Black observed in pleased surprise. "We'll have to get you to give us some music after dinner."

"Oh, no—no! I don't—not for worlds!" cried Chloe brokenly.

She was still laughing when they turned their backs on the beach and started up the path to the fort. Naked children scattered before them, and parrots squawked from the open door of one hut larger than the rest.

"Sort of a store," said Doctor Black. "We'll keep right on; I want you to see the fort, really. It's about three hundred years old, and there's a moat around it where they say the Spanish galleons used to sail in from the open sea. It's a great old ruin,—four big sentry towers chipped by bullets, prison cells with crosses cut in the walls. I think you'll like it."

"Seeing the ages have been kind enough to keep it for me till to-day, I should, shouldn't I?" said Chloe radiantly.

She picked her way through the long grass with eager steps.

"I never saw anything the least in the world like this before," she said suddenly. "I can hardly believe it's me seeing it. I have the queerest feeling of unreality, you know. All this tropical stillness—the queer people—the green greenness of the earth and the—the abso-

lutely unclouded sky. I feel as if I were asleep or something—as if something were going to happen.”

“You may have a touch of tropical fever,” said Doctor Black with decided interest, but Chloe said she thought it was not that. To leave the subject of herself behind, she said:

“That’s a slightly bigger hut over yonder— and cleaner looking.”

“Think it’s the Commandante’s,” said Doctor Black.

A little further on they came to the fort. It was a great unhumbled thing of stone, squatting dark against the opalescent clearness of early evening. Four sentry towers marked its corners, but the moat where any number of Spanish ships might gallantly have sailed was rank with grass and weeds.

“*‘Helen’s lips are drifting dust,’*” said Chloe softly.

“I beg your pardon?” said Doctor Black.

The two entered the wide deep sally-port and stood within the enclosure of the fort.

“It almost frightens you,” said Chloe, “doesn’t it?” Her voice broke in a little stammer. “Oh—who—who is that over there?”

In the nearest corner of the enclosure a man

in an old blue shirt and khaki trousers, with a panama pulled down over his head, stood up, turned suddenly at the sound of their voices, and came toward them. He had the effect rather of rising from the earth. Doctor Black looked startled.

"Somebody from the *Fortuna*," he muttered, "most likely. No white men here."

But it was not some one from the *Fortuna*, and it was a white man.

Chloe knew instantly, though she had seen it but once before in her life, that thin pleasant face with the cool eyes and the clean controlled mouth.

"How do you do?" she said calmly, after the merest flicker of a start. "Are you looking for bugs, Mr. Wheeler?"

"I am," said Mr. Wheeler. "Don't shake hands with me, please, I'm a bit messy."

"You really are," said Chloe, and presented Doctor Black.

For all the background of prison cells and tropic stillness and sentry towers and ghostly Spanish galleons, the three might have been standing upon the curbing of a congested street, waiting the thrust of a traffic policeman's thumb.

"I didn't know there was a white man in miles of this place," Doctor Black marvelled frankly.

"Except myself, there isn't," said Mr. Wheeler. "I'm doing some work for the Government here. Department of Agriculture." He turned to look directly and rather long at Chloe.

"This," he suggested, with a trace of amusement, "is about as extraordinary as anything that ever happened to me."

"I am making the voyage with my god-mother, Madame Lejeune," said Chloe, a little aloofly. She hardly knew why the explanation, any explanation at all, seemed necessary, but it did.

"On the *Fortuna*, of course." Mr. Wheeler nodded.

Chloe observed that he looked thin and very brown as well as a little tired. She had a certain impulse and yielded to it.

"I wish," she said graciously, "that you would dine with us to-night on board the ship. I should be glad to have you meet my god-mother, and if you are the only white man in Amoa, perhaps you're just a little tired of dining by yourself. Are you?"

"I am," said Mr. Wheeler briefly. "And I shall be uncommonly glad to come. At what time—"

"We'll send a boat in for you—about half-past six," Doctor Black supplied good-naturedly. He thought of the girl in Mississippi and saw rose color. "Meantime, Miss Malone, I don't want to hurry you, but—"

They parted from Wheeler at the door of his shack, which was the one Doctor Black had supposed belonged to the Commandante, and went back down the path to the beach. The sky was already flaming with the approach of sunset, and the little valley between the sea and the mountains gleamed with an emerald richness.

"How small the world is, after all," said Doctor Black profoundly. "You knew Wheeler in the States, I suppose?"

"I think it's terribly big," Chloe objected, "and I think my godmother will be wondering if I have not been eaten by a shark. Yes, in the States."

Madame Lejeune, when she heard of the dinner guest to be, paused in the contemplation of an already perfect coiffure and turned upon Chloe the searching gaze of her lorgnette.

"*Mais enfin!*" she said at last. "Who is this young man? And what does he do with bugs in a jungle? You say your mother has met him? I am not at all sure, Chloe—"

From the shallow depths of an insufficient closet Chloe returned to view, bearing a frock on a hanger.

"He is a scientist," she explained carefully. "Dan knows him, and he is very charming indeed, dearest, so if I were you I would wear my chantilly scarf. I see you have left it off to-night."

"Is that the reason," Madame demanded pointedly, "why you bring out the most imposing of your gowns? Is this then an occasion? And if the young man arrives in a flannel shirt—"

"He won't," said Chloe serenely, taking down her soft black hair.

Events justified her confidence. The boat that went into the beach at half-past six o'clock returned with Wheeler in the conventional garb of a young man about to dine with a lady. His raiment was entirely what it should have been. Madame Lejeune's eyes softened at sight of it.

Possibly for reasons of discretion, possibly

out of a very natural curiosity, Madame Lejeune placed Wheeler between Chloe and herself at dinner. Chloe's demureness was unexampled. Midway of the meal she skilfully revealed the fact that Wheeler spoke French and thereafter left him to her godmother's delicate mercies. But after dinner was another thing!

There was a moon that night. When Chloe and Wheeler came up on deck, it was just lifting itself above the edge of a waveless sea, and all the world had faded into white and black and silver laid on in flat smooth washes.

Madame Lejeune sat in her deck chair, very stately and small, and Chloe and Wheeler leaned against the rail, their shadows falling vaguely behind them, and talked in low-voiced snatches.

"Pierrette!" said Wheeler suddenly. "That's what I'm trying to think of. All this black and white—that big, flat moon—and you in that black and white frock. Did you do it on purpose?"

"A woman does everything on purpose," said Chloe mischievously, "doesn't she?"

She stood a little away from the rail, hands linked behind her, and looked at the moon. In

that unreal and pallid light she was, as Wheeler had said, very suggestive of Pierrette. She had put on a gown whose flounces, alternating black and white, fluttered from waist to ankle. Her white bodice, quaintly buttoned with little balls of jet, left warm white throat and slender arms half bare. She had done her hair with a French simplicity, and in the center of her lovely chin was one small, black *mouche*. "*Au clair de la lune, Pierrot, mon ami—*" she murmured sweetly.

Wheeler looked at her and smiled without a word. Behind her lay the sea, flatly pale, turning to silver; beyond, the faintly glimmering beach, the dark valley set with a few winking points of light; and beyond that again, the utter relentless blackness of the mountains shouldering the sky.

"Is this the long trail you were coming on, to look for the small but vicious bug?" asked Chloe suddenly.

"You had my letter, then? Yes, I'm doing some parasitic work here. Something about the boll weevil. You wouldn't be interested. Tell me about your Queenship. Was it fun?"

"You wouldn't be interested," said Chloe

coolly. She leaned her arms upon the rail and looked down at the water lipping against the side of the ship.

Wheeler laughed shortly.

"Well played! I saw enough in the papers, however, to gather that you were about the most successful débutante of the season; the season, you may remember, was just about to open on that very muddy night in last November when you first ran into my taxi and then took me to my train and sent me on my way with a bandaged paw. Queen of Comus, weren't you? And Maid of Atlanteans—and Maid of Twelfth Night—and Maid of Momus?"

"Yes, I read the papers too—on rainy Sundays," said Chloe slowly. "The boll weevil is doing a great deal of damage, isn't it? Especially in Louisiana. And they don't seem to be able to stop it. Shall you find a parasite for it down here, do you think?"

"What do *you* know about parasites?" asked Wheeler indulgently.

Chloe's smile tilted her red lips adorably.

"And what do you know about women?"

"Pretty, but useless," he told her kindly.

"Nice to play with?" she flung out.

"If you've got time to play," said Mr. Wheeler.

Chloe's eyes deepened suddenly; she stopped smiling.

"You work terribly hard, don't you? Do you like it?"

"If I didn't, I'd be doing something else."

"But all men," said Chloe insistently, "don't work like that. I know some—who hardly do anything at all—and they seem contented—perfectly."

"All right, if you like it that way," the man conceded laconically.

"You wouldn't?"

He shook his head.

"Why?"

"Matter of personal preference, that's all. Work is a kind of fight to me, my work especially. It's getting things done right—making nature the highest possible degree efficient—finding out how forces can be used and using them—" he broke off abruptly. "You can't possibly be interested in my shop."

"If you say that again, I shall be very angry with you," said Chloe more warmly than she knew. She added after a moment: "Mr.

Kinloch told me something about your work."

"Dan Kinloch? Of Louisiana?"

"Yes."

"Oh," said Wheeler dryly, "did he? Well, he can't have told you much, because he knows very little about it. He's a first-rate example of the absentee landlord. He owns three plantations, and all they mean to him is the rent he gets from the people who work 'em. All he knows about the boll weevil is that if it gets any worse, he stands to lose a bit of money. The land itself is nothing to him. He doesn't care whether it's overworked or not. He doesn't even take the trouble to know that it *can* be overworked. He lives in New Orleans, and he draws his rents in Natchez. That's as near as he gets to sticking on his job. I don't care much for—"

Chloe's cheeks burned with a sudden fire.

"Mr. Kinloch is my friend—and a very delightful gentleman," she interrupted icily.

Wheeler stiffened at her tone.

"I'm sorry if I've discussed your friend," he said, "and he may be the most delightful gentleman in the world, I dare say he is. But he's loafing on his job just the same, and I told him so the last time I saw him. He's the sort of

man that ought to be pulling your splendid old South out of the rut—and isn't."

Their shadows were black upon the deck behind them. Chloe turned, and all her Pierrette ruffles whispered sweetly together. Her dark eyes softened.

"He *is* big enough to be doing big things," she said, relenting. "And just this one night we really needn't quarrel about him anyhow. Our ways don't seem to lie too close together."

"For the next few days I'm afraid they do," said Mr. Wheeler imperturbably.

Chloe looked at him curiously.

"We sail to-morrow, at daylight."

"No," said Mr. Wheeler, "you should, but you don't. There's something the matter with your propeller; the captain tells me it may take a day or two to fix it. They'll have to lay over here. It's too bad, if you're disappointed."

Chloe did not say that she was or was not.

"I wonder," she offered presently, "if my godmother knows?"

A little smile twitched at her lips.

Behind her dark head the moon, flat and white as the face of a clown, swam up a breathless sky.

CHAPTER IX

“**I** BEGIN to believe in Fate,” said Chloe.
But she said it to herself.

She watched her dinner guest go over the side of the ship and saw him get into a little boat and saw him rowed out into the silver of the sea on his way to the strip of beach which is Amoa before she turned away from the railing and went down to her cabin for the night.

Lying in her bunk a little later, with her black hair streaming over the pillow, she stared at the porthole and smiled.

“If it isn’t Fate,” she sighed to herself, “what is it?”

She turned on her side and slept before she found an answer.

Next morning Madame Lejeune received word of the accident to the ship’s propeller with a certain amount of skepticism.

“How is it,” she demanded, “that you do not tell me this before?”

"Why, *Dearest!*" said Chloe reproachfully, settling her panama on her dark head and stuffing a handkerchief into the pocket of her pink sweater-coat. "I really believe you think I broke it. I didn't. I shouldn't know a propeller if I were to meet one. It's broken, that's all I know. Perhaps a shark or a whale or something did it. Anyhow, the captain says we shall have to lay over here until it's fixed—a day or two perhaps."

"Or a week?"

"Oh, not a week," cried Chloe in dramatic horror.

"Meantime," Madame Lejeune proceeded, diverted not at all by her godchild's pleasant-ries, "meantime there is the young man who looks for bugs—in the jungle. We see him again, one supposes?"

"One hopes," corrected Chloe demurely.

"He interests you, then?"

"Oh—*comme ci, comme ça!*" said Chloe grandly.

"Humph!" said Madame Lejeune. She seized her fan as if it had been a hand grenade and put on her steamer bonnet as if it had been a helmet.

"Don't you like him?" Chloe teased.

Madame Lejeune shrugged and rolled her eyes. She was thoroughly uneasy.

"For a gentleman," she observed with biting scorn, "he works very hard and chooses a strange place to live."

"His home is in Boston," suggested Chloe meekly.

"I have never," said Madame Lejeune, "considered Boston the home of an aristocrat. It is too far north." Which was, of course, unanswerable.

Nevertheless, that night Wheeler dined on the ship again,—this time at the captain's invitation.

"You'd better come over to dinner every night while we're here," that grizzled emissary of Fate had said. "We'd be glad to have you, and you won't get another ship in two weeks. Look for you about seven."

So Wheeler was on deck that night at seven with his accustomed impassivity covering a rather warmer interest than he had brought aboard the night before.

"Did you find your parasite to-day?" Chloe asked him, when they sat in the stern of the ship after dinner. Madame Lejeune had reluctantly succumbed to the temptations of

auction in the captain's quarters, and the two were comfortably alone. "And what does it look like when you find it? I'm terribly curious: I always thought a parasite was a man who lived on his wife's money."

"Why not a woman who lives on her husband's money?" said Wheeler coolly.

"But she has a right to it."

"Legally, not morally—unless she's of some use in the world."

"Isn't being pretty and charming being of some use in the world?"

"Not a darned bit."

"Oh," said Chloe, "you *are* stern, aren't you? We shall be quarrelling loudly if we go on at this rate. I won't talk to you about women. You don't know anything about them. Tell me about the boll weevil and what you're doing down here. You're rather wonderful when you talk about your work; you seem to fire up so."

"Why should you care a hang about the boll weevil?" Wheeler inquired amusedly. His tone, the careless little gesture of his hand, the look in his eyes, stung Chloe unaccountably.

"I'd like to know about it," she insisted.

"Why shouldn't I? Do you think I'm not intelligent enough to understand? Is that why you won't tell me?"

"Oh, not that at all," Wheeler said at once. He frowned and smiled and shook his head impatiently. "Only what's the good of going into it for you, when you're simply passing an idle hour by asking polite questions. I do fire up, as you call it, but I don't care to be regarded as a spectacle,—the only living volcano in existence—or something of the sort."

Chloe sat up on her steamer chair and locked her hands about her knees. She looked at the man beside her with a disarming frankness, her dark brows arched, her cheeks flushing.

"No," she said. "I'm asking because I want to know, and because I imagine you could tell me a wonderful lot. You're the first man I have ever known who *liked* to work. Is it because your work is so much more fascinating, or what? I'd like to see for myself."

"You don't really need to think of my sort of work in your sort of life," Wheeler said slowly.

"You mean—"

"We don't touch anywhere."

"Because you think I'm so useless?"

"Not you in especial, only your kind of girl."

Chloe was silent for a moment after that. She looked slim and exquisitely boyish in the clear moonlight. She had not dressed for dinner, and her short white corduroy skirt and white silk blouse with its open collar gave her a little careless touch of gallantry.

Presently she turned and looked full into Wheeler's eyes with an imperious tilt of her head.

"Now tell me about the boll weevil," she commanded.

Wheeler capitulated with his short laugh.

"What do you want to know?"

"What does it do?"

"Eats cotton bolls—in its grub stage."

"So the bolls are spoiled?"

"Absolutely."

"What does it look like?"

"Rather like an elephant."

"You're making fun of me."

"No I'm not; it's got a long beak that it punctures the cotton boll with, then it lays its eggs in the hole and goes away. The egg hatches a grub, and the grub eats the cotton. There you are. A great many grubs eat a

great deal of cotton; that's where your friend Mr. Kinloch comes in."

The mention of her friend Mr. Kinloch brought an unwilling warmth to Chloe's cheek. She sat up straight with an indifference bravely attempted.

"But—but—a bug to look like an elephant—how big would it be—for pity's sake?"

Wheeler's mirth startled the quiet air.

"I beg your pardon," he said when he could speak, "I do beg your pardon! It would be a quarter of an inch long and an eighth of an inch wide, or thereabouts."

"I don't like to be laughed at," said Chloe coldly.

"Sorry."

The ship's bells rang softly, and with the sound Chloe began to laugh herself, a little shamefaced.

"I was thinking," she explained, "how could anything that looked like an elephant lay an egg in anything as small as a cotton boll; no wonder you don't want to talk to me about it. I must seem very stupid to you."

"Not stupid," said Wheeler, "only uninformed."

"Oh, is that any better?" said Chloe. She

looked at him gravely. "Where did you say my friend Mr. Kinloch came in? I didn't understand exactly."

"When a considerable quantity of his cotton is destroyed. He loses money. That's his only interest in the subject."

"And what could he do—that he doesn't do?"

"He could stay on his job and see that his plantations are run along decent lines—clean agriculture—rotation of crops. You haven't an idea in the world what all this is about—"

"Do you think me incapable of learning?" Chloe inquired hotly.

"It isn't your life," said Wheeler shrugging.

"How do you know what my life is going to be?"

"I know a butterfly when I see one," he told her stubbornly. "You forget it's my trade to know 'em."

Chloe stared at him in silence. Her eyes were dark and deep. She looked more like the heroine of a drawing-room comedy than a young lady in search of information concerning agriculture.

"Very well," she said at last, "suppose I *am*

silly and useless; it doesn't hurt you to tell me the things I want to know."

"Not the least in the world."

"And you may be reforming—a butterfly."

Wheeler only laughed.

"You think it isn't possible," said Chloë sweetly. "Perhaps it isn't. Now, I want you to tell me what *you* think ought to be done about the cotton growing. Is the small but vicious bug you're looking for down here supposed to fight with the boll weevil, or what? And does the Department of Agriculture—is that what you call it?—send you out to look for it?"

There was a certain sort of pathos in her determined struggle to get at the root of the matter. She had for the moment the look of a nice child wrestling with fractions. Wheeler warmed in spite of himself. His voice took on the keen inflection that talking shop always brought to it. He opened his left hand and tapped the palm of it with the first two fingers of his right while he spoke, leaning forward in his steamer chair and frowning a little out of sheer earnestness.

"What I'm looking for," he said crisply, "is a parasite—a *Bracon*—*Bracon beneficiens*—

I'll probably call it if I find it. This parasite would, I suppose, lay its egg in the weevil grub which is already resting in the interior of the boll. D'ye see? When the *Bracon* hatches out, it destroys the weevil grub. Do you follow that? In a comparatively short time, I think the weevil could be controlled in that way—"

"I see," said Chloe eagerly. "And the Government is sending you down here to try and find it—the *Bracon*. I think it is wonderful; it's a sort of splendid mission, isn't it?"

Wheeler's frown deepened. He leaned back, thrusting his hands into his pockets.

"Unfortunately, the Government merely thinks me an ass with a hobby. They let me come out here under protest to look for my parasites, but as soon as I get my teeth into the work, they write me a letter and order me off to another sort of place altogether. They don't believe I'm going to find anything here. I differ with them."

"You've written them you want to stay?" Chloe demanded, tense with an interest that surprised herself.

"I've written them that if they insist on tak-

ing me off this special piece of work, I'll send in my resignation to take effect at once."

Without intention and unexpectedly, their talk had taken them into deep waters. Chloe's voice quivered with earnestness, and Wheeler drummed steadily on the arm of his chair.

"I think I know what I'm doing," he said more quietly, "and I'm going to stick. If the Department won't see me through, then I'll stay here on my own. It's a big thing I'm working at, you know—not to be kicked overboard at the first discouragement. I'm going to stick, and the Department can take me or leave me. Why on earth am I telling you all this?" He was far too much in earnest even to smile at the immemorial question.

"Because I was never so interested in all my life," said Chloe simply. "It's like art for art's sake, with you, isn't it? It's the work itself you care for—not promotion—or pay—"

"Pay!" said Wheeler and laughed, throwing out a careless gesture of protest. "We don't build any castles on our pay, that's certain."

"That's what I mean. It's really the work you love."

"Otherwise," he said briefly, "I'd never touch it. It's both ill-paid and thankless."

Chloe shut her hands together tight.

"I think," she began—but Madame Lejeune having royally won her game, came around the corner of the deckhouse, leaning like the wicked fairy upon her crook-topped ebony cane.

"My little one," said Madame Lejeune significantly—

The evening so far as the two in the stern were concerned was over.

CHAPTER X

THERE remained however the morning and the evening of the next day and the afternoon of the third when, in the face of Madame Lejeune's finesse, Wheeler took Chloe ashore to look at his breeding cages. There, within four walls of fine wire netting, certain untroubled insects multiplied and replenished the earth with a vast unconcern for the lines of their ultimate destiny.

Chloe's questions had become more intelligent. She no longer visualized the boll weevil as a mammoth laying its eggs in a cotton boll, and she hung about the cages utterly fascinated.

"Those weeds," she said, "in the bottom of the cage—are they for them to feed on?"

Wheeler nodded, smiling.

"Common pigweed, that's all."

"Oh," said Chloe, drawing a long breath, "all this—it's like a new world to me, you know."

I never dreamed that you could fight one insect with another. I thought if the boll weevil came, we just had to lose our cotton, that was all. It never occurred to me that some man with a brain could go off to one of the four corners of the earth and find another little bug and bring it home and use it to drive the weevil out of the cotton fields. It's like a crusade, with you for the knight."

"Nonsense!" said Wheeler, flushing uneasily. "It's not a new thing. It's all been done before. Take the Hawaiian Islands, for example; they've been immensely successful out there in the matter of parasites—the sugar industry, you know. They've got a parasite for the cane borer that they had to send to New Guinea for—one for the leaf hopper that came from Fiji—one for the Mediterranean fruit fly that came from South Africa—that last was Government work. Amoa is Broadway in comparison."

Doctor Black and a girl from South Dakota, propriety of Madame Lejeune's designing, stood at a reasonable distance, observing the native flora. Doctor Black looked amiable, the girl from Dakota a trifle fulsome. She had not been much with men, and she was

apt to clutch her opportunities unsparingly.

"Even if it has been done before, aren't you sacrificing your chances of promotion—everything—to stay and finish your work here? Why! if you leave the Department, as you said the other night, you're giving up your very position." Chloe's eyes were shining. "And all for the South—to save a section of the country whose men are not even helping you out by running their own plantations properly!" She stopped, twisting a tough little spray of grass between her fingers. "I think it's wonderful of you."

"It's nothing of the sort," said Wheeler, almost rudely, "and a good many of the plantation owners are on their jobs. Don't get that idea into your head; you're overrating my work. I must have talked too much."

"If you leave the Department, who's going to pay you for all of this?"

Wheeler looked surprised and a little amused.

"No one that I know of."

"The planters won't pay you, even if you find the *Bracon*?"

"They'll be doing well to pay themselves, just at first."

Chloe's lovely eager face broke into a smile. She put out her hand impulsively.

"Shake hands with me, please, I'm very proud of knowing you."

"When the queen stoops—" said Wheeler, on an impulse of his own, and touched his lips to the slim soft fingers. He could be very human, but he could also be sorry for it afterwards, and Chloe, glooming in her cabin as she dressed for dinner that night, could be sorriest of all.

"I must be losing my mind," she told herself, "and Chloe, my dear, you'd do well to keep it. Where's your sense of honor? Where's your pride? A man like that isn't really interested in silly you. He's selfish—and cold—and hard—and his work is the only thing in the world to him. I wish the propeller were mended."

Later, at dinner, the captain announced that it was.

"We'll get out of here at midnight," said the captain. "That's good news—eh?"

Wheeler, who had shamelessly accepted the captain's earlier invitation for dinner every night of the *Fortuna's* stay, lifted his eyebrows and made no comment.

"*Grace à Dieu!*" said Madame Lejeune frankly.

Chloe only smiled. It was not however, as Madame Lejeune observed in a sidewise glance, an altogether care-free smile. When dinner was over, Madame Lejeune came to a decision. She accepted Wheeler's arm as convoy to her deck chair, and when he had settled her to her perfect comfort, waved him to a seat beside her. Chloe in a white gown, with a rosy cobweb of a scarf which floated from her shoulders as she walked, was going around the deck.

"Tell me," Madame Lejeune began a little arrogantly, "how is it you endure this wretched hole? Three days here, and I am sick already."

Wheeler replied in French, in which the conversation thereafter remained, that men were of coarser fibre, and that he had been too busy moreover to really feel the desolation.

"My godchild," said Madame Lejeune, looking more than ever like an unscrupulous small marquise of great age, "positively suffers."

Wheeler said nothing at all.

"She is sick for New Orleans, *pauvre*

petite!" Madame Lejeune continued with meaning.

"A very delightful old town," said Wheeler.

Madame Lejeune sighed tenderly.

"Not that alone. It is a secret as yet, but one may confide in you, she is affianced—my little Chloe! To a most charming young man."

That shot went home. Wheeler's lips tightened before he spoke.

"Is it permitted to ask—"

"To Mr. Kinloch—of New Orleans and Natchez," Madame Lejeune replied softly, making delicate use of her lorgnette. "You know him?"

"Slightly."

"He adores my child."

"Quite naturally."

"He has your felicitations then?" the little old lady inquired with a perceptible tracery of malice.

"My sincerest felicitations," said Wheeler steadily.

Madame Lejeune leaned back in her chair, satisfied but not satiate. She had thrust in the knife, but she had not been able to see the wound.

"They will be very happy," she said distinctly.

Wheeler said, rising from his chair as he spoke: "I am grateful for your confidence, Madame Lejeune."

He bowed himself away and went straight to Chloe, whom he found leaning against the rail in a deserted corner of the deck.

"You might have told me," he said, without preamble of any sort, "that you were engaged to Kinloch. Don't you think so?"

Chloe drew herself bravely up out of a mist of dreams and wonderings. As always, at the bare mention of Kinloch's name, the blood swept up into her face.

"Why should you care—one way or the other?"

"I am not going to care," said Wheeler quietly, "but I should like to have known. I am deeply sorry that you let me discuss him with you as I did. Personally, I haven't a doubt in the world of his worthwhileness; I want to tell you that. I think he will undoubtedly make you very happy. Any quarrel I may have with him is from my professional standpoint only—and I'm rather a fanatic on that—as you may have observed.

I want to say good night, now; I'm going ashore."

"It's good-by too, isn't it?" said Chloe, stretching her scarf between her hands. She looked persistently off across the darkness of the water.

"Yes," said Wheeler, "it's good-by, too."

But he did not go at once. He stayed, folding his arms and leaning against the rail, his eyes on Chloe's face.

Chloe brought her own eyes to meet them.

"What did you mean," she asked, with sudden difficult daring, "when you said you were not going to care?"

Wheeler spoke slowly and yet without surprise at the question.

"Because it's no good for either of us."

"You mean—my engagement?"

"Not at all, that has nothing to do with it, in my eyes. I mean the sort of girl you are, and the sort of man I am. I could care, I think—perhaps—I could even make you care, but we'd be bad for each other—that's all. I could never make you happy, and you'd stand in the way of my work. That's why I say I'm not going to care. Your godmother helped, though I don't know that that was her

intention, exactly." He talked in slow careful sentences, oddly broken. "A girl like you is born and reared to the soft places of the earth. She's got to have them. Pretty clothes and pretty people to play with—furs and feathers and jewels and stuff—you're made for beautiful backgrounds. It would be the sheerest madness for a man like me—a tramp with a crusade, if you want your own words for it—to let himself—"

He did not say what he was or was not to let himself do. He clenched one hand and regarded it earnestly through the dark.

"Are you apologizing for not falling in love with me?" asked Chloe icily. Her voice was shaken with an indefinable hurt.

"I'm not apologizing for anything. You know better than that, Chloe Malone."

A little start ran through her when he said her name.

"Then go on," she ordered, with a queer reckless laugh. "Tell me the rest of it. Tell me how a girl like me would stand in the way of your work. I'm interested. No man ever talked to me like this before."

Wheeler did not answer for a moment.

"Do you think," he said at last, "that a

butterfly could last out a sandstorm? A girl like you would stand just as much chance, in the Godforsaken corners of the globe where my job takes me. She couldn't rough it, and I'd hate to see her try. I'd have to go, but I wouldn't want to leave her behind. Then I'd begin finding reasons for easier assignments—sticking to the railroad. That's fatal. I'd end by losing my nerve and sitting down in a laboratory in some big town for the rest of my days, because she was afraid of the open, and night with no electric signs on it bored her. Do you see?"

"Yes," said Chloe, "I'm clever enough for that. I see."

"She ought to have money," Wheeler went on directly, "and I wouldn't have it to give her. You know what that's the beginning of—or do you?"

"I do—rather better than you may imagine."

"You don't make money at my kind of work," he said grimly. "If you try, you lose the fine edge of what you're working for. You've got to be heart and soul in what you're doing and utterly disinterested as to what you get for it. But you can't reasonably expect a girl to share that point of view—a girl that's

been used to having every mortal thing she wants. That's why I say—"

But for the second time that night he did not say whatever it was. He left it in the air between them.

Chloe, twisting her fingers in the rose-colored scarf and holding her proud head high, spoke first.

"One or two men have told me why they thought they could care for me," she said, in a voice that tried for disdain and fell short of it. "You are the first man who has ever told me why he could *not*."

"*Would* not," Wheeler interpolated curtly.

"Don't you think, no matter how useless I seem to you," Chloe went on, ignoring the correction, "that you might have omitted the story of my poor little butterfly life?"

Her voice was unsteady before she stopped.

"I didn't mean to hurt you," he told her. "I don't think I have. You know what I'm saying is so. You could easily make me lose my head, and if you did, I might be able to make you lose yours. What would be the use? I can't afford to love you. That's God's truth."

In the moonless dark that hid the nervous

closing and unclosing of one hand, he added stoically:

"You're headed straight for a life that fits you. I'm making mine according to my light."

"What sort of a life fits me?"

"Money, position, fine feathers, love-in-idleness—"

"You think I am marrying the right man, then?"

"Absolutely."

"But you told me, before you knew I was to marry him, that you thought he was lying down on his job; isn't that what you said?"

"I have already apologized for my indiscretion," said Wheeler stiffly.

The flimsy scarf tore in Chloe's hands with a little hissing sound. He heard her catch her breath.

"But you can't apologize," she said passionately, "for thinking that a man who would lie down on his job would be good enough for *me!*"

Chloe had come a long way in those four days in the harbor of Amoa. Her words in her own ears startled her pulses to breakneck speed. Instinct within her made for cover.

"You were going to say good night," she prompted coldly. "I am glad to have seen you again."

The conventional platitude separated them at once and widely, but Wheeler swept it aside.

"You should have let me go before. I have only succeeded in offending you, now."

"That is absurd," said Chloe, turning away from the rail and the outer darkness. There was a little film of ice on her voice. She was bitterly hurt. "How could you offend me? I wish you every success in your work for the Department. I have been very much interested."

Wheeler walked beside her down the deck.

"I shall not be with the Department any longer," he said quietly. "I had a cable just before I came on board to-night. They insist on transferring me, so I am going to resign."

Against all good intention, Chloe stopped in her tracks. She caught her hands impulsively together.

"How unfair! How dreadfully unfair of them!"

"Not in the least," Wheeler objected, smiling wryly. "I know them of old; they're clever men and big men. It's just a difference

in viewpoint, that's all. I can't see this thing their way, so I'm going to cut myself loose. They may be in the right. I may never find the beast I'm looking for—but I've got to have a shot at it. Good night—and good-by."

He turned—Chloe had not noticed that they stood at the gangplank—and started down. His little boat swung idly at the foot of the ladder, with one calm brown man in the stern.

"Will you say good-by to your godmother for me," Wheeler added as an afterthought.

Chloe leaned on the railing and looked down at him, her hair dark about her face, her eyes just at the last a little wistful. She neither knew nor cared to inquire of herself what prompted her soft hurried words:

"Let me know—I shall want to know if you find it."

"Thanks," said Wheeler, looking up at her, his hat in his hand. "I'd like to write, sometimes."

There was the sound of oars in the water, presently, and the little boat slid away from the side of the ship.

CHAPTER XI

ALL the way from Amoa to New Orleans, across the smooth green reaches of the Caribbean and over the sapphirine hillocks of the Gulf of Mexico, up the great, treacherous tawny river and until the *Fortuna's* nose warped alongside the dock at the foot of Joseph Street, Chloe was thinking of Courtenay Wheeler and his work, also, occasionally and in passing, of the reasons which he had so clearly explained to her why a man of his sort could not afford to fall in love with a girl of hers.

If Wheeler had been that most superfluous of the species, the male flirt, which distinctly he was not, he could not have gone about it better to insure a place in Chloe's meditation.

She thought of him coldly, helplessly, with anger and without, with her eyes warm with tenderness, and with her nose tipped up in

scorn. She visualized him deliberately, and he came before her eyes when she wished him elsewhere. He had told her how useless she was, and she spent long hours in imaginary conversation wherein she cleverly but with a killing disinterest showed him his mistake. She thought of his boll weevils and his parasites and gloried over the man-size stubbornness which had made him cut himself loose from the Department of Agriculture because they did not believe, as he did, in the ultimate success of his project. She thought of him, alone, to all practical purposes, in the deadly if lovely dullness of Amoa—the only white man on the place, for even the cable operator was a half-breed,—and her heart melted in her breast. She wished at once to comfort him, to scorn him and to do him homage because he had set his work above her, and there is no surer spur to a woman's interest.

She thought of him, in fine, until the *Fortuna* docked at New Orleans one bright April morning, and Kinloch, with her mother beside him, met her at the foot of the gangplank.

Chloe saw to it that Madame Lejeune went first, brave in a wonderful dust-colored taffeta with a floating veil and a plume in her bonnet

like a tip of flame against the delicate conservatism of her other garments.

Even so, the gangplank was not endless, and Madame Lejeune, leaning upon her crook-topped ebony cane, moved surprisingly fast. Soon enough Chloe found Kinloch's hands on hers and felt upon her face the ardent hunger of his eyes.

She was a little glad of the Gallic temperament which set her mother and godmother laughing and weeping together upon the dock.

"*'Cré misère!*" cried Madame Lejeune. "Even the land rocks beneath my feet." She swore delicately; queer, little perfumed French oaths, as an old lady may who looks like the latter years of Ninon de L'Enclos and walks like the wicked fairy in the pantomime.

Mrs. Malone clung to her recovered child as to the prodigal returning from his husks.

"And to think that she has been two weeks away from you!" said Madame Lejeune, not altogether cynical.

When the flood tide of emotion had subsided, Kinloch took Mrs. Malone and Madame Lejeune gallantly, one on either arm. Chloe, with a flicker of his eyes that was half appeal and half possessive command, he sent ahead.

"Let's all go home," he said, "and talk it over."

He marshalled them into his big car,—Chloe noticed with an unwilling little thrill of satisfaction that it was new and the last word in its kind, and took them home. Madame Lejeune had first to be driven to the stately old place in Esplanade Street, but after that there was the long cool ride uptown, the click of the gate, and the swept and garnished welcome of the house in Dufossat Street,—Chloe's own house with Chloe's own mother stopping on the steps to point out Chloe's own wistaria vine breaking into bloom above the very threshold. Chloe felt as if she had been away from it all for years. She hugged her mother and blinked the tears out of her glorious eyes.

"Won't you come in, Dan?" she said graciously to Kinloch, and Kinloch came in. There were flowers in the house.

"Who's having a party?" Chloe demanded, whirling on her heel.

Her mother smiled at Kinloch, and Kinloch slipped his arm around the waist that Dennis Malone had once been able almost to span with his two hands. There was obviously already a very pretty understanding between the two.

"In honor of the distinguished visitor," Kinloch explained boldly.

"Meaning—me?"

"Nobody more so," said Kinloch.

There were roses in the hall, red roses which Mrs. Malone disliked from force of association but had learned to suffer for Chloe's sake; roses in the drawing-room, flaunting incongruously beneath the old steel engraving of Charlotte Corday in Prison; roses in the dining room, where the silver teaset that had been Dennis Malone's wedding present to his wife shone, rubbed to a dazzling state of freshness, on the old mahogany buffet.

"Oh, you all are too good to me!" cried Chloe. She hid her face on her mother's shoulder and cried a little in good earnest.

"Now run up-stairs and take off your hat," said Mrs. Malone presently, wiping her eyes on Chloe's handkerchief, "and we will have some chocolate—no? I have some brioches for you—hot in the oven. Dan likes brioches too."

So Chloe went up-stairs to take off her hat. There were more roses, of the sort known as American Beauties, on the table beside her bed. Chloe laid her cheek against their cool sweet-

ness,—they were too tall for her to stoop to them,—then took off her hat, dropped it upon the bed, and went to look at herself in the beautiful old pier glass which had once belonged to the great-great-grandmother.

She looked at herself intently. She had a feeling of being swept along, past many things she wished to consider. But the mirror gave her back much her usual self: flushed cheeks, black hair a little tumbled, she pinned it into place with impatient fingers, a lovely mouth too steady, and dark eyes too soft from recent tears. For the rest, the little blue serge frock in which she had landed.

Chloe went down-stairs with a sort of not unpleasant uncertainty. She had wasted as much time in her bedroom as she decently could, but Mrs. Malone remained determinedly invisible, and there was still Kinloch. When you have promised to marry a man, you cannot put him off forever with the tail of your eye and the tips of your fingers.

So Chloe met Kinloch in the hall, where he had stood all that time leaning patiently against the window, and he drew her by one hand into the drawing-room, before Charlotte Corday and the roses, where his patience came

suddenly and almost violently to an end. He put his arms about Chloe with some broken little word, she never rightly understood what, and held her terribly close, and put his cheek against her cheek and kissed her. The instant before he kissed her, Chloe feared more than anything else in the world the touch of his lips, but the instant after, she knew a subtler, more unlooked for fear, the fear of herself. Kinloch's kiss had not found her responsive, but neither had it left her unmoved. Poor Chloe! Wheeler had called to her drowsy mind, but Kinloch was fast awakening the selfish human. The hoarse little break in his deep voice roused all the sleeping women whose lives the old mirror in Chloe's room had seen smoulder and flare and sink into ashes.

The great-great-grandmother's eyes had been velvet-black—so were Chloe's; the great-great-grandmother had carried to her grave a little brown mole on her white left shoulder—and Chloe had that mole; the great-great-grandmother had broken one man's heart and betrayed another—and blood will tell, although its tales are not always strictly consistent.

"Chloe—are you—are you glad to be back to me?" asked Kinloch.

And Chloe said she was.

"I've *missed* you! There's nothing to it, without you," he told her.

Chloe, the proud, the unattainable, smiled and sighed.

"Your mother and I have gotten to be great pals," said Kinloch.

That unlocked the inner gate.

"You're adorable to her," said Chloe quickly. She no longer felt fettered, not even strange. Of her own free will she put up a shy white hand and patted Kinloch's red curls.

"I love you for that," she said. Which came as near the truth as anything she might have told him.

Then Mrs. Malone came down the hall.

Chloe did not see Kinloch again before he left, which was just as well perhaps for both of them. Kinloch, to do him justice, would not have forced himself for one small moment on Chloe's attention, provided he knew that attention to be unwilling, but how was he to know? Chloe, when all was said and done, had promised to marry him, and Kinloch had not that red head for nothing. He loved hard, and saw no necessity for concealing the fact.

Chloe, on her mother's lap in the room with

the mirror and the American Beauty roses, once Kinloch had gone, had a long story to hear of her fiancé's goodness.

Excitement and happiness flushed Mrs. Malone's soft face, almost obliterated the lines about her mouth and eyes. She looked incredibly young again.

"Me—I am in love with him, myself!" she said. "You cannot imagine, *chère!* Every few days, flowers—fruit—a quail, perhaps. For my dinner once, a pair of duck—you know how crazy I am for duck! *Bien!* And three or four times a week he comes himself to take me out in the big new car. I ask you—is that an ordinary young man? Every Sunday I burn a candle to St. Anthony for him. It is not every man I would trust you to, *bébé.*"

"Indeed, no!" Chloe agreed solemnly.

Mrs. Malone pursued after a long sigh of contentment:

"But with him to take care of my child—I can go, in peace."

"Go where?" cried Chloe sharply. She caught her mother's face between her two hands and looked at her with dark bright eyes that missed nothing. "You are not to talk like

that. Do you hear? I won't have it. You're looking beautiful—you look younger this minute than I do—you're just trying to frighten me—kiss your child!"

So Mrs. Malone kissed her child, and Chloe put her head down on her mother's shoulder, and the two rocked together in silence, as if Chloe had been indeed the very little girl her mother's arms once knew.

Afterwards Chloe got up and went out to see how the violets were blooming, and Mrs. Malone followed her, and they spent a very peaceful morning pottering around the fragrant scrap of a yard.

"You must go to Amoa some day, dearest," said Chloe, "you certainly must. It's like something out of a book—or a theater. Green water, white beach, the most wonderful moon in the world."

"I should like to go," said Mrs. Malone. She added after a little frowning pause, "Are there sharks?"

"Lots of 'em," Chloe agreed, her eyes on the lavender glory of the wistaria.

"Me—I am back already!" said Mrs. Malone quite seriously. Amoa troubled her dreams no further.

Amoa, however, was not so easily blotted out of the daughter's existence. Three days after she got back to New Orleans, Chloe went down to the Public Library and asked for a book on parasites.

"Bugs, you know," she explained to the anaemic-looking young lady behind the desk, "not people. Something on entomology."

"Something of Fabré's?" suggested the young lady. She knew Chloe at once from not infrequent pictures in the Sunday editions, and she wondered deeply why a girl who had been considered the most successful débutante of the season, a girl who had been Queen of Comus and maid-of-honor at three other balls should care for parasites. Nevertheless, she gave Chloe two volumes of Fabré's delightful meanderings and watched her out of the door with something approaching a sneer.

"Heaven," said the young lady behind the desk to a second young lady who had come up on rubber heels and was stamping dates on little cards, "gives almonds to those who have no teeth to crack them with."

"They say she is going to marry Dan Kinloch," returned the second young lady who had dark smooth hair and a tired smile. "Don't

worry. She can crack her own almonds all right. Leave it to these little Vere de Veres. They know what makes the mare to go. Have you seen that last copy of Imagist poetry? I can't place it."

The little Vere de Vere who knew what made the mare to go went home and read Fabr  through all of a fascinated afternoon. How much of her interest was biased by the memory of Amoa it would be difficult to say. That night she showed the book to Kinloch and asked him if he had read it.

Kinloch laughed indulgently.

"I thought girls never got any deeper than the six best sellers, never read anything but love stories."

"Then *you* think we're useless too?" said Chloe.

"What do you mean?" asked Kinloch, genuinely puzzled.

Chloe told him about Amoa and about Courtenay Wheeler. The meeting had been somewhat on her conscience, and she liked to feel free.

"He's given up his position with the Department," she finished with a touch of vicarious pride, "because they don't believe he can find

this parasite there, and he's sure he can. I think that's rather fine of him, don't you?"

Kinloch blinked at her lazily. They were sitting in the dusk of the Malone drawing-room, lit by an old Dresden lamp and fragrant, as always, with Kinloch's roses. Chloe sat in a deep armchair and Kinloch on the sofa, an arrangement not to Kinloch's choosing.

"Oh, yes," he said at length. "Wheeler's a fine chap. Stubborn as a mule too. He sets his teeth in whatever he goes after. You say he thinks he's going to find a what-do-you-call-'em for the boll weevil?"

"A parasite; he thinks perhaps it will be a *Bracon*," said Chloe coolly.

Kinloch flung back his head in a big laugh.

"Cunnin' Thing," he said caressingly, "what do you know about *Bracons*? Is that what you call it?"

The color burned suddenly in Chloe's face. She drummed on the arm of the chair.

"I don't say I know anything, but, Dan, what do *you* know?"

Her heart began to beat heavily with a sense of her own daring.

"Not a thing," said Kinloch placidly, "not a

thing. I leave that to the people who work the plantations.”

“And suppose they are too ignorant—or too lazy?”

“Then I reckon I lose some money.”

“And eventually you lose your plantation.”

“What do you mean, sweetheart? I’m not going bankrupt just yet.”

“I mean you can’t work any land forever; it wears out. It won’t grow things for you.”

“Wheeler say so?”

“Yes,” said Chloe, her head high. “Mr. Wheeler says so, but of course any other scientist would say so too.”

CHAPTER XII

SHE softened suddenly, putting out an urgent hand, her eyes big with feeling. "Listen, Dan. You ought to know about these things. Don't you care whether the land you own is worked right, or not? Don't you care whether your crops are saved from the boll weevil, or not? They've got all sorts of new methods." She leaned towards him across the arm of her chair flushing deeply in her earnestness. "It isn't like it used to be when the planters just put the seed in the ground and watched the cotton grow. There've been too many crops one after the other without giving the ground a rest, and when the weevil comes along, why that just finishes the story. You'll be ruined some day, unless you watch your step," she broke off with a little laugh, curbing her excitement.

"Looks to me," said Kinloch pleasantly, "as if you'd been going to school to Mr. Wheeler.

He told me all that when he was down here. He's an alarmist. All bug hunters are." He kissed her fingers, and she drew them away from him.

"You wouldn't listen to him?"

"Good Lord! I couldn't help myself. I had him to lunch once or twice. I thought he'd throw the bread at me."

"Well, don't you care?" Chloe insisted. "Dan—don't you care—*at all?*"

"I care more about you than about anything else in the world," said Kinloch.

Chloe put him off with an impatient hand.

"But your plantations, Dan, your cotton—your work."

"I never was much good at work," Kinloch denied mournfully. "When I was a kid I hated school. The old man, my father, y'know, tried to make a lawyer out of me. Saw it wasn't any use. Had to give it up. So he just washed his hands of me; left me the plantations, that's all. Would you like me to be a horny-handed workman, Cunnin' Thing, and eat my worthy dinner out of a bucket?"

"Ugh!" said Chloe, before she could stop herself.

They both laughed.

Kinloch recaptured her hand and kept it. He pulled the sofa, which was aged and creaked at the indignity, a little nearer.

"I can't seem to see you fixing up anybody's dinner in a bucket," he told the delicately manicured fingers he held.

"I don't want you to be a day-laborer; don't be silly," said Chloe, stifling a smile.

"You ought to have all the pretty-pretty I can give you, and then some more," Kinloch went on, his look warm on Chloe's face. "You're the sort of girl who's just made for the soft spots. You ought never to have to lift a finger. Some women can't carry luxury gracefully. You could. You ought to have all the pretty gowns and the stunning hats and the gold and silver shoes and the flowers and the jewels and all the pretty fooleries that you can get away with—and I'm going to give 'em to you—if you'll let me."

Chloe's blood ran faster. She knew in that moment, if she had never known before, what all those things meant to her. Kinloch, however, had come to the apex of his intensity and started back with a laugh.

"But don't ask me to carry my dinner in a bucket, that's all. You never saw the sort of

dinner that goes in a bucket, or you wouldn't have the heart."

"You're laughing at me," said Chloe, with the little flare of haughtiness that Kinloch still found irresistible.

It occurred to her afterwards that Wheeler's estimation and Kinloch's had not been far apart, only Wheeler had decried in her the very thing that Kinloch loved.

"She ought to have jewels and laces and furs—a girl like you," Wheeler had said, "and I could never give them to her without neglecting my work."

He had not cared to neglect his work; had not considered worth while a life in which the standards of that work would be lowered, even for the possibility of a woman in that life.

Chloe grew hot and set her teeth whenever his words came back to her, which was not infrequently in the course of the next few weeks.

She found, notwithstanding the inner disturbance of her old self-satisfied dreams, that the world to which she had come back went on precisely the same. There were the same tea parties, fewer now and quieter, because of the approaching summer and the yearly exodus; the same girls endlessly engaged in the same

feverish round, pursuing and pursued; the same talk of clothes, the same flirtations beneath which the inevitable purpose showed occasionally a gleaming skeleton. An engagement announced—that was the sign of a successful season.

"I'm going to spend next winter in the East." That was what the girl who had failed to "make good"—"second-year girls" they called them—said.

"New Orleans is a *débutante's* town," Chloe heard an older woman say one day, at a luncheon at the Country Club. The phrase stayed in her mind and rankled. Then she thought of Kinloch and realized that her own existence as a unit of society was justified. She was forever sheltered against the reproach of inadequacy. To Chloe Malone, the bud, would presently succeed Mrs. Daniel Kinloch, the rose in full flower. There would be no second year of disappointment, no third or fourth or fifty years of chilling suspense,—the fruit on the bough waiting for the hand to come and pluck it. "She was engaged at the end of her first season to one of the richest men in town." That would be the Iron Cross of Chloe Malone.

If Chloe felt the pressure of the atmosphere about her, she was not less than human. She managed, however, to get from the Public Library other books on entomology at large and a few specifically dealing with the work which had been done on insect parasites. These she read in odd snatches, hungrily almost, though she would not have admitted to herself that the echo of Wheeler's curt laugh in her ears had anything to do with her desire for knowledge. Between times she went about with unflagging energy and kept Kinloch at half-mast, as it were.

Various people entertained for Chloe, in the phrase of the moment, and Madame Lejeune about the middle of May announced a large dinner party, as a sort of tacit approval to be bestowed by her upon the situation.

Chloe's frock for the dinner party consumed an old mahogany card table which Mrs. Malone pretended to care for no longer, and for which Raspard, the Royal Street dealer in antiques, had long since made her an offer. Upon the morning of the essential festivity, Madame Lejeune sent for Chloe and fastened an exquisite string of corals about the girl's white neck.

"I wore them at my first ball," she said a little jealously. "I had more color than you, my little one." She added, her eyes very bright, "On your wedding day I give you my pearls."

Chloe kissed her godmother on both cheeks.

"You are a great deal better looking than I am this minute," she said audaciously; "and you know I am only marrying Dan to get your pearls, don't you?"

By the noon mail that day, Chloe had a letter from Wheeler. She took it up to her room and opened it with fingers suddenly nervous and a little cold.

"You said you would want to hear," he began abruptly without address of any sort, "and I am taking you at your word. I think I've got what I've been looking for. I've got a *Bracon* which looks to me as if it might be going to do the work. You remember I told you I thought a *Bracon* might be the one for the job. I'm rearing a colony of them in the breeding cages I showed you, with a view to taking them up to the States some time next month. There is every indication that I'm right, this time, and without a claim in the world to your interest, I'd like to have you say

you're pleased and wish me luck. Of course, it's something of a job getting them up to the States too. Some of them are almost sure to die on the way. I shall have to nurse them like babies. You'd laugh to see me feeding them—sugar-water and pigweed, once a day. I'll be going through New Orleans. I'd like to see you while I'm there if I may. Even if a man knows a pretty lady isn't good for him, he might like to run out of bounds, once in a lifetime."

That was all. The gown for the dinner party, a lovely thing of coral chiffon with many flounces, lay on the bed, and Kinloch's rosy orchids were, as it happened, at the moment on their way up-stairs in Mrs. Malone's caressing fingers.

Why should a pretty lady who knows she isn't good for a man thrill over his successes and thrill deeper because for once in a lifetime he wants to run out of bounds?

Chloe thrust the letter out of sight at the sound of her mother's footstep on the stairs. She met the orchids kindly, if without her entire attention.

That night, coming home from the dinner party, which was a triumph of its kind, with

Madame Lejeune in a pompadour brocade at the head of the table, and deserves a longer mention than this, Chloe told Kinloch of Wheeler's letter. She told her story with shining eyes and cheeks that flushed as she went on, but Kinloch took it calmly.

They were flashing past Lee Circle at the time into the wide dark stillness of the Avenue lit with its lambent arcs, and they were by themselves in Kinloch's limousine, because Mrs. Malone earlier in the evening had pleaded a headache and had remained at home.

When Chloe had finished, she waited a moment, frowning at Kinloch's lack of enthusiasm.

"Well," she said imperiously. "Well, Dan! Don't you see? He's got the parasite, now—"

"That's fine," said Kinloch. "Does he think it'll do the work?"

He seemed to Chloe's excited sensibilities to be asking not because he wished to know, but because he thought she wanted him to ask. She looked at him almost coldly.

"What do you think he's been working for, Dan?"

"Oh, he's a fiend for work, that chap," said Kinloch comfortably.

He took Chloe's hand, but she snatched it away from him.

"Do you realize that he's found something that will—control—the boll weevil?"

"Cunnin' Thing!" said Kinloch adoringly. "You talk like one of those high-brow plays. They've been after that weevil thing some time now—and the going is still good."

"Do you know what it would mean to the South?"

The little devil of cross purposes put words into Kinloch's mouth and pointed his teasing chuckle.

"Gentlemen, I ask you," he drawled, "what has the Republican party ever done for the State of Arkansas?"

There remained two blocks (for the limousine had slipped like a dream between the shadows) before they came to the house on Dufossat Street; and Chloe rode those two blocks in silence.

Kinloch followed her up the steps and into the dimly lighted hall.

"Look here, Cunnin' Thing!" he began indulgently.

Chloe slipped off her coat and dropped it on a chair. She put fan and gloves down on top

of the coat and faced Kinloch squarely through the semi-gloom. She was quivering with passion. She had been desperately in earnest, and she had been laughed at. She flamed into startling beauty.

"You don't do things yourself," she said distinctly, "so you can't understand a man who does. You're lazy, and you can't understand a man who works. You ought to be running your plantations like a man, and you're playing around with me, like a boy. You don't know how to do anything but play!"

Kinloch began to speak, but she silenced him with one gesture of her hand, the hand, incongruously, that wore his ring. She had kept her voice low for the sake of her mother, upstairs, but it vibrated with excitement and anger.

"It's bad enough for a girl to be useless—but a *man*! You could be so big too! But you don't want to; you don't care. Somebody goes out into the loneliest places in the world and toils and gives up his chances of money and fame and everything—to find what you need—to keep your plantations going—and when you hear that he's got it—you *laugh!*"

She drew a long shaken breath.

"You say you care more about me than about anything else. Well, let me tell you one thing; there isn't a woman in the world can stand in the place of the work a man has got to do to be a *man*! If she does, she's in a wrong place, and she's got to come down. She's no good to herself there, and she isn't good for *him*."

She stopped, one hand gripping the other tightly, and Kinloch spoke at last.

"Does Wheeler know," he asked with somewhat heavy sarcasm, "that you are engaged to me?"

"What has that to do with it?" said Chloe. She felt chilled and foolish after her outburst. She felt the tears stinging her eyelids.

"I don't know you like this, at all," said Kinloch.

"I don't know myself," she told him sullenly.

There was a little rustle at the head of the stairs, and Mrs. Malone's soft whisper floated down.

"Chloe! Is it you?"

"Yes, *chère*," said Chloe quickly. She made a little nervous gesture to Kinloch for silence.

"Don't forget to turn out the light," came the tired admonition. "Dan must go home. It is late. Good night, Dan!"

"Good night, Mother Malone," said Kinloch huskily. "Sweet dreams!"

The rustle at the head of the stairs died away. In the dim-lit lower hall the man and the girl looked at each other, their eyes still hot with conflict. Then over Chloe like a wave over the sand came the realization and the recollection of many things: for one, what was she to Wheeler, or he to her? Her whole destiny seemed to lie in another direction.

As for Kinloch,—after the first ungovernable resentment, he saw, perhaps, that least said might after all be soonest mended.

He held out his arms without a word, and Chloe went to him, defeated, a sob in her throat.

CHAPTER XIII

QUARRELLING with the man you have promised to marry is bad business at best; when the object of that quarrel is a man who has no time for pretty ladies, the thing becomes an absurdity. You sleep on it and wake with the taste of regret on your lips.

Chloe quarrelled, Chloe slept, and seven hours later Chloe woke to the shrill clamor of the telephone just outside her door.

"Is it for me, *chère p'tite?*" she called quickly, and then relaxed and waited, dark hair flowing over her pillow, dark eyes thoughtful.

From the hall her mother's voice replied to her. Mrs. Malone had never lost the soft Gallic cadences of her youth.

"Chloe, it is Dan."

"So I suppose," said Chloe grimly to herself. She got out of bed, slipped her feet into sandals, drew on a faded pink kimono that had once been vivid, and went out of the room.

Her face was unsmiling when she picked up the receiver, but with the first word that sang against her ear she flushed and softened.

"Sorry?" said Dan Kinloch at the other end of the wire.

"You're sorry?" she repeated incredulously.

"No, you are. I knew you would be."

"Oh! Yes, I am. Is that what you wanted?"

"To begin with. You're still going to marry me, aren't you?"

"Don't be absurd."

"Even if I don't do things myself and can't understand a man who does?"

"Please, Dan—"

"Even if I *am* lazy and can't understand a man who works?"

"It's perfectly true, but I had no right to say it to you."

"Even if I do put you before everything else, and it's the wrong place for you? Cunnin' Thing, that was an awful speech you made me last night!"

"I told you I was sorry."

"Still love me?"

"Do you think I'm going to say so over the telephone?"

"I love *you*, Miss Malone."

"Well, it's very nice of you if you do," said Chloe, the sudden tears hot against her eyelids, "because I wasn't very fair to you. I don't like *myself*, these days."

They talked a little longer, until Mrs. Malone came down the hall with Chloe's breakfast on a tray, at sight of which Chloe said good-by and remembered that she was hungry.

Seated cross-legged in bed a little later, with the tray in her lap, she described to her mother, at length, the splendors of the night before. It was the usual procedure, whatever Chloe's state of mind. Mrs. Malone had seen through Chloe's eyes all the parties of an unusually brilliant season.

"And Godmother," Chloe wound up above the last of her tea and toast, "Godmother was simply unbelievable. She had on a new gown—a sort of pompadour brocade—and her lovely white hair combed high—and her string of pearls—and she was painted like a Louis Quatorze beauty—she really was."

"Oh, *chère!*" murmured Mrs. Malone.

"I loathe paint on most people," Chloe continued calmly, "but on Godmother it seems so appropriate. If she took her walks abroad in

a sedan chair, I shouldn't say a word. She's merely out of her century. Mr. Henri Martin asked her last night what she thought of the feminist movement, and what do you think she said?"

Mrs. Malone looked a mild excitement, while Chloe lifted an imaginary lorgnette to survey an imaginary Mr. Henri Martin.

"'Old maids, turned fishwives!'"

"What *is* the feminist movement?" inquired Mrs. Malone, after a polite semblance of mirth.

Chloe blew her mother a kiss.

"I may be in it, some day, darlingest. Ask me, then."

Mrs. Malone had taken up the burden of her household when her husband at his death laid it down and had maintained that household decently with no help beyond her own two delicate hands, yet she had no idea what the feminist movement might be or that a part of its reasoning lay within the scope of her own experience.

"You'd never want to vote, I suppose, would you?" asked Chloe, twisting an edge of her napkin.

"For what?"

"Oh, like a man, you know."

"But I am not a man," said Mrs. Malone with extreme conviction, beginning to clear away Chloe's tray. "If the good God had wanted me to vote, he would have made me a man. A woman is made to be taken care of—how do you say?—spared. Life should be all pretty for her."

There it was again. "Pretty but useless," Wheeler had said. "You ought never to have to lift a finger." That was Kinloch's version of it. Now Chloe's own mother—

"Life hasn't been all pretty for *you*, that's certain," said Chloe.

Mrs. Malone sighed.

"I have been un-for-tu-nate. Besides, now that Dan—I am happy now."

Chloe kissed her mother when the heavily veined little hands lifted the tray.

"I'll see that you stay happy," she promised recklessly.

To Kinloch that night she made gentlemanly reparation for the storm of the night before.

"I wouldn't hurt you for anything in the world," she said earnestly, "because you're so good to me, and so *wonderful* to mother; but Dan, I seem to think about things more than I did a while ago. And I'm ambitious for you,

that's all. I know *I'm* useless, but that is what I've been taught to be. You're different, you've got your plantations. You've got a chance—"

"I see my finish," said Kinloch sadly; "you'll have me in overalls yet."

"You're laughing at me; you always laugh at me," Chloe told him haughtily. She had a horror of ridicule, but she persisted, which showed the reality of her struggle, for Kinloch met any question of the sort with an amused indulgence. The most serious consideration in his pleasure-loving existence was, to all appearances, Chloe herself.

So Chloe, after that one conversation the night of her godmother's dinner, kept her own counsel regarding Wheeler and answered his letter briefly. Some things she would like to have said she withheld. In the end she sent the second writing. Kinloch himself might have seen it.

"You must know," she wrote, a little stiffly, "that I am glad to hear your good news. I was sure you would find your parasite, and perhaps when you have brought the *Bracon* back with you and saved all our cotton from the boll weevil—perhaps the whole South will

be grateful to you. I shouldn't, however, expect it if I were you. If it is any comfort to you to know it, I wish you all the luck in the world. And when you do bring your parasites up to New Orleans (I should love to see you feeding them on sugar-water and pigweed along the way), I hope you *will* come to see me. I shall certainly be very much hurt if you don't."

There was a postscript, of course, slightly wistful:

"I have been reading some books about your kind of work. If I were a man, I think I should like to be an entomologist."

A week after Wheeler received that careful little letter in Amoa, Spanish Honduras, he took himself and a prayerfully selected colony of *Bracon beneficiens* aboard the S. S. *Fortuna* and began the journey to New Orleans. As he had written Chloe, he had to care for the tiny insects as if they had been babies.

Chloe knew the day he started. She marked it on a little brassbound calendar that stood on her desk. When six subsequent days had elapsed, she read in the morning *Times-Picayune* that the *Fortuna* was in. At noon that

day the telephone rang. Chloe answered it herself; she had been waiting for it.

"I should like," said a cool detached voice, "to speak to Miss Chloe Malone."

Chloe's heart raced for a moment like a screw out of water.

"I am Chloe Malone."

"This is Courtenay Wheeler."

"I knew—" she caught herself up— "I recognized your voice."

There was an empty pause.

"How—how are the bugs?" asked Chloe, with a nervous little laugh.

"The bugs are dead—thank you."

She gasped, her eyes horrified.

"Your parasites—your *Bracons*?"

"Two died the second day out; rest of 'em died last night."

"Last night?"

"Yes."

"You say they died *last night*? When you were almost here?"

"Yes."

"Oh, you poor boy!" said Chloe in the softest sort of whisper. It carried, nevertheless. And she knew instantly she had not meant to say it. So did he.

"Rotten luck," he said briefly to cover her confusion, then very quietly: "Thank you, Chloe Malone; it's all in the day's work."

"What are you going to do?"

"Go back on the next boat and begin again."

There was another awkward little silence.

"Oh, I think that's too *dreadful*," Chloe mourned.

"Can't be helped. I'm disappointed, of course."

"You will go straight back?"

"I can get a boat in a week."

"Shall you be in New Orleans all that time?"

"Your friend, Mr. Kinloch, has asked me to lunch with him to-morrow—I believe you and your mother are to be asked as well—so I'm here till to-morrow night. Then I'm going to run up to a plantation or so. I'll be back here next Tuesday and sail Wednesday—sort of a flying Dutchman."

"I feel flattered," said Chloe, a shade less warmly, "at receiving such a detailed account of your movements."

"I only wanted to explain why—"

"Why we shan't be allowed to see much of you."

"If you choose to put it that way."

The slight stiffening in his tone warned Chloe's temper. She thought of Amoa, the lovely, tropic desert place, and melted.

"I'm sorry—my mother will be sorry."

"Thank you. I've got to see a man from the Department of Agriculture who's in town to-night. But I'll see you to-morrow at lunch, if I may."

"You *are* a sort—of wanderer, aren't you?"

"What did I tell you on the deck of the *Fortuna*, that night—in Amoa?"

Chloe said good-by softly but definitely and put up the receiver. She had the clearest kind of memory of that night on the deck of the *Fortuna* and of certain things she had no wish to hear again. Her whole life seemed to have altered subtly since that brief and inauspicious voyage to Amoa. The routine of her days before, so gleamingly satisfactory, now irritated and unsettled her. Wheeler had aroused questions in her mind. He had even made her question her own value as a human being, which in itself is enough to unsettle the smuggest among us. Once you begin to doubt the world's need of you, your personal essentialness to the scheme of things at large, you have opened a road to wakeful nights and many of

them. Chloe was finding this to be the truth and resented her findings bitterly.

She went at once to her mother with her news, even though she told less than half of it; she had need of some one to listen.

"Mr. Wheeler is in town, *chère*,—the nice man whose taxi we upset the night of my début and whom I met again in Amoa—remember?—when I went down on the *Fortuna*, with Godmother."

Mrs. Malone looked up from the eternal mending. She had a party frock of Chloe's in her hands.

"Oh, yes, he is a chemist—no? Your godmother said he dined on the boat—several nights. I think she did not like him very much."

"He is an entomologist, dearest; not a chemist at all," said Chloe sweetly, "and she did not like him because she was afraid I did. Well, Dan is having him to lunch to-morrow, and you and me."

"Dan has telephoned?"

"Mr. Wheeler has telephoned," said Chloe. She turned pink. "Dan will, later, I suppose."

"Oh!" said Mrs. Malone absently. "I think you had better wear your blue voile. I can

finish it to-day." She did not question Mr. Wheeler appearing thus interestingly like genii from a vase. It would not have occurred to her that Mr. Wheeler or any one else could in any way affect Dan's relation to Chloe. "Are your new white gloves clean?" asked Mrs. Malone.

Chloe went obediently to see, and finding that the gloves in question were not altogether spotless, immersed them as obediently in gasoline. Her thoughts, however, toiled along totally different lines. She spent a restless night.

Kinloch sent his car for Chloe and her mother next day and met them for luncheon at the Grunewald. He brought Wheeler forward with a laugh and a little gibe—"the hunter of big game, home again." But Chloe fancied that Kinloch's eyes, in the course of the luncheon, missed no slightest glance that passed between Wheeler and herself.

At that, Wheeler was not given to glances; there was nothing the most jealous lover might not have seen undisturbed.

Chloe took herself in hand. She ate and drank in a determined attempt to be matter of fact. She burned to hear of Wheeler's unfor-

tunate parasites, but she wanted Kinloch to do the asking. Eventually Kinloch did—across the lavender orchids in the center of the table.

“Have you told Miss Malone?” he inquired, “about the poor little bugs.”

“Yesterday, over the 'phone,” said Wheeler coolly. “Miss Malone was good enough to be interested in their fate.”

Mrs. Malone wrinkled her soft brow painfully, appealing to Chloe.

“What poor little insects, *chère*?”

But it was Kinloch who explained.

“Mr. Wheeler has been down in Spanish Honduras, Mrs. Malone, looking for a parasite to fight the boll weevil. He found it, but apparently it can't be transplanted. The whole bunch died on the way up from Amoa.”

Wheeler's inflection was a trifle curt.

“Pardon! It can be transplanted. It is merely a matter of time.”

“And faith,” said Chloe. Her face was glowing.

Both men looked at her, and one of them thanked her with his eyes. The other smiled and shrugged his big shoulders.

“I've heard that faith can move mountains,” he said lightly, “but can it move little bugs?”

"It might be able to move the men who were after the—the little bugs," Wheeler returned significantly.

Chloe had almost the sensation of an eyewitness at a duel. In another day and time, she thought, these men would have gone into the open, settled their differences with steel. Yet, after all, what difference had they, except a matter of opinion? Was not she, herself, the unspoken cause of the hostility between them?

Her mother's low voice broke into her musings.

"Chloe, what is that big book you have from the Library with all the pictures of insects?"

"That is *Smith's Economic Entomology*," said Chloe. She lifted her head a little, meeting Kinloch's look of surprise with a defiant smile.

"How did you like it?" asked Wheeler quietly. There was a smile in his eyes, too, but of a warmer sort.

"Chloe is becoming very in-dus-trious," Mrs. Malone continued jestingly. "All the time now, she reads these books—from the Library. One of them had pictures of cotton bolls, Dan. I find them on her table, with maybe a rose to

mark the place. Poor little rose! all crushed between pictures of insects."

Strangely enough, no one laughed at Mrs. Malone's gentle humor. Chloe flushed scarlet. Wheeler looked at the back of one hand. As for Kinloch, he signed to the waiter and asked for his check. Quite possibly he did not care for the thought of his poor little rose crushed to mark an entomological place.

The luncheon came shortly to an end, and Kinloch put Chloe and her mother into his car at the door of the hotel, while Wheeler waited beside him. By that time, Kinloch's smile was once more friendly. He was sure that he had misinterpreted Wheeler's acquaintance with Chloe, sure that Chloe was only, as she herself had said, thinking more about things than she used, possibly turning to study. Women had these fads.

"I've been acting like a Turk," said Kinloch, half-amused, to that inner uncertainty. "What the dickens is the matter with me?"

So he said good-by to the two women, and Wheeler said good-by, and the car slipped away. The party broke up in almost a flush of amity.

CHAPTER XIV

“**C**HÈRE,” said Chloe reproachfully just before the car turned into Dufossat Street, “whatever made you tell about the books?”

“I knew Dan would be pleased,” said Mrs. Malone, with a proud little smile, “that you should be reading such things, because of him.”

If Wheeler was an entomologist, Kinloch was also a plantation owner. The subject of cotton and cotton pests might interest either man. Which was one way of looking at it, of course. After one startled glance, Chloe shut her lips and said no more about it. She could not altogether stifle a laugh, but she was conscious of a lack of merriment.

That week she suffered exceedingly from conscience and suspense. While she went about with Kinloch, her thoughts were persistently of the other man, his ill-luck and the composure with which he met it. Chloe had begun

to look at herself a little critically these days.

"I think I'm a piker," she told her mother quite seriously. "I'd never be able to stick at a thing in spite of obstacles, the way Courtenay Wheeler does, for instance."

Mrs. Malone said she did not know what was a piker. She had some difficulty with the word.

"A piker," said Chloe thoughtfully, "is a cheap sport, like me. I want a lot, but I don't want to risk anything to get it."

"Are you sure it is a nice word for a lady?" inquired her mother doubtfully.

"It's the most accurate word I know, for myself," said Chloe.

Mrs. Malone waived discussion and began to talk of trousseaux. It seemed that it was time to make a start. She said she had found a sewing woman who would come for a dollar a day, and should they begin with the lingerie? Chloe entered at once and accurately into the subject of nainsook and laces even while she listened for the postman's whistle and wondered if Wheeler had reached the plantation in the north of the State, for which he was headed.

"You cannot have too much real lace," said

Mrs. Malone at an acute stage of the conversation.

"I know—that's one of my troubles," said Chloe. She kissed her mother's cheek and laughed a little.

The sewing woman was therefore engaged, and the house on Dufossat Street became at once a place where soft white fabrics overflowed the chairs, and lengths of lace and pieces of exquisite embroidery lay on all the tables. Scraps of whiteness littered the floor from morning till night. The sewing machine droned endlessly, and food was a thing to be eaten standing, between sartorial crises, as it were.

But while the mother fitted *filet* and *valenciennes*, of Madame Lejeune's gift, upon the slim white shoulders, the girl's thoughts were scattering. Day after day went by without a word from Wheeler. It was Sunday, and she did not know even if he were still in the States. That day she drove with her mother and Kinloch out into the country and came back late at night. It was Monday, and the postman passed the house three times. It was Tuesday. Chloe told herself sternly that no nice girl would start and tremble as she did when the

butcher telephoned to say that he "had no veal and would beef do?" At noon—still Tuesday—the deadlock broke. The telephone rang again, and there was Wheeler's curt friendly voice breaking out of the subsequent silence:

"Well, I'm back."

Chloe had been trying on an elaborate petticoat with camisole of lace and had gone to the telephone as she stood, arms and shoulders bare.

"That's very nice," she said carefully.

"You sound a little bored. If I'm interrupting you—"

"It's nothing," she told him hurriedly, "I want to hear about your trip. Did you get to the plantations? Do you leave for Amoa to-morrow?"

"Yes, both ways. I'm sailing to-morrow at noon. That's why I rang you up. Can't I see you some time before I go?"

"Oh, yes. I should like to see you."

"To-night?"

"To-night? I think so."

"You couldn't dine with me, I suppose—alone?"

"No—I'm sorry. I'd rather like to."

She heard his short laugh.

"Of course not. The world is too much

with us—eh? Suppose I come out after dinner, then. Could you go to some sort of a show?"

"Yes, I could do that."

"All right—say about seven-thirty. I've got a lot of stuff to tell you."

Chloe turned back into her room with her head high and stood before the great-great-grandmother's mirror. He had a lot of stuff to tell her. That was another story. She remembered very clearly his refusal at Amoa to talk shop.

"You can't possibly be interested," he had said, meaning, as they both understood, that she knew nothing at all about the subject. Now he spoke to her as to a comrade. She had a sudden warm feeling that he had been wanting to talk to her ever since the day of Kinloch's party.

"Who was that, Chloe?" asked her mother, sitting down on the floor to shorten the flounce at Chloe's knees. "And are you tired?"

"It was Mr. Wheeler," said Chloe frankly, "and I am not tired at all. I am going to a show with him to-night. He leaves to-morrow."

Mrs. Malone frowned faintly.

"With some one else, perhaps, with Dan and with some other girl?"

"No," said Chloe firmly, "with nobody else at all. Now, darlingest—"

So Mrs. Malone let it pass. She had never known how to refuse Chloe anything, and she felt that she was too old to begin. Miss Lafaye, the little sewing woman, suggested at this point that she thought the flounce seemed too full and Wheeler was easily lost sight of in the more important question.

Out of sight but not in any way of speaking out of mind. Chloe came back again and again like a child coming back to some small prized possession to that magic phrase. He had a lot of stuff to tell her. Never pretty lady lent more willing ears.

At seven-thirty that night Wheeler came, as he had said he would, and Chloe met him at the door in the kind of a frock that men know as simple, women as smart. She had put on her hat when she heard his step at the gate. Her cheeks were warm with excitement.

"Won't you come in and see my mother for a moment before we go," she offered almost shyly.

Mrs. Malone was very gracious to Wheeler.

She told him of the pleasure it had given her to see him, and that she was sorry to know that he sailed so soon. She considered him merely an unimportant acquaintance of Chloe's, and when the door had closed behind him presently, forgot him except to hope that he would not keep Chloe out too late. So far away may flesh of your flesh be, while it walks beside you daily.

It was May and the theaters were closed. Wheeler suggested moving pictures.

"We can talk better there, anyhow," he said.

So they went into one of the newer movie houses on Canal Street and sat down about the center of the darkened auditorium. Chloe took off her hat and held it in her lap.

"I couldn't remember whether your hair was brown or black," said Wheeler abruptly.

"Which is it?" asked Chloe, smiling under lowered lids.

"Black, of course. It's wonderful."

"I wasn't sure you remembered much of anything about me."

"Too much for my own comfort."

Chloe wanted to say: "And not enough for mine." Instead she looked at the screen.

"Is this going to be a good picture?"

"What's the difference?" Wheeler returned coolly. "We came in here to talk. I like the privacy of a crowd, don't you?"

Presently he leaned a little nearer, sinking his voice to an undertone and twisting his programme into odd shapes.

"Have you been engaged to Kinloch long?"

"What earthly right have you," said Chloe proudly, "to ask me a thing like that?"

"You needn't answer unless you like."

"A few months," she told him, after a strained pause.

"You're changed," said Wheeler briefly.

"Since you saw me in Amoa?"

He nodded.

"How have I changed?"

The orchestra, waking apparently from intermittent slumber, plunged headlong into the Overture to *Wilhelm Tell*. Fifes and horns made a glittering melodic background in Chloe's ears for the voice beside her. She looked at the screen and saw a meaningless glimmer of shadows.

"You're finding yourself—like Kipling's ship—aren't you? I thought you were just a piece of prettiness."

"And now you think I'm not?"

"Now I think you might be anything you choose. You've got it in you to be either a doll or a real woman!" He asked after a second's curious hesitation: "What did it?"

Chloe answered as frankly: "You."

"The things I said to you in Amoa?"

She quoted: "'Pretty but useless.' You said I was headed for the life that would fit me, 'money, position, fine feathers, love-idleness!'"

"You must have thought me an officious prig."

"I must have changed, if you're apologizing."

They looked into each other's eyes and laughed, Chloe, at least, a trifle nervously, the man with a trace of repression.

"Better not go into what I think," he said at last. "Do you want to hear about my parasites?"

Chloe drew a long breath.

"Once you wouldn't talk shop to me. Remember?"

"I know. I was a blind ass. I'll be proud to, now, if I may."

"I've been waiting and waiting to hear," said Chloe.

So Wheeler told her. In the middle of the exceedingly businesslike narrative, Kinloch, who had an empty evening on his hands and nothing to do with it, came into the place and sat down in the seat directly behind Wheeler. Neither Chloe nor Wheeler seemed aware of him, so Kinloch sat still and, after one imperceptible movement of surprise, quiet with a half-smile on his face.

The orchestra having been in at the death with *Wilhelm Tell* whined sweetly into *Peu d'Amour*.

The story of the unfortunate parasites was neither long nor, in Wheeler's telling, marked with any superfluous detail.

"So they died on my hands, the night before I landed," he finished comprehensively, "but they're what I want, mind you, and they can be brought in here. Emphatically, it can be done. I'm going back to start another colony of them, and when they're ready, I'll make the trip over again. I am absolutely confident that the boll weevil can be controlled by this *Bracon*. You do understand, Chloe Malone?"

That gave Kinloch a little start.

"You mustn't give it up, whatever you do," said Chloe eagerly. "I'm believing in you all the time. You make work and life and everything seem so—so big to me. I hate to think how useless I am, myself."

And that gave Kinloch a second start more vital than the first.

"I'm a pitiful failure, that's what I am," said Chloe suddenly. Her eyes were stormy. "My mother spends her life waiting on me—and I let her do it. You were right. Everything you said was true. I've thought about it enough. I don't seem to justify my existence, do I?"

"It's up to you," said Wheeler. He spoke shortly because something quite otherwise clamored to be said, and for the same reason he looked away across the house.

"Funny! I was quite happy before," said Chloe.

"You're not happy now?" asked Wheeler.

"I think I need something to do," she told him desperately.

He looked at her in silence.

"Bully for you!" he said at last.

Kinloch leaned forward and put a hand on

Chloe's shoulder. He had, one supposes, heard enough, or too much.

"What *is* this?" he inquired lightly, "a socialist meeting? And did you know, Miss Malone, that the performance was over?"

The lights were up all over the house, and people were streaming down the aisles. Neither Chloe nor Wheeler had been aware of the fact.

"Come out and have an ice somewhere," said Kinloch.

It was a distinctly humorous moment. What might or might not have been overheard left room for considerable constraint. The three went out into the street. Later they had an ice, and later yet, still three in number, they said good-by at Chloe's door. Kinloch apparently was not to be evaded.

The next day a messenger brought Chloe a note and a box of valley lilies.

"I felt distinctly ridiculous last night," said the note, "and not a little cheap. My hands were tied, of course. If it's any comfort to you to know it, Chloe Malone, I'm not the self-sufficient ass I was. I'll see you again when I've done a trifle more toward justifying my own existence."

Chloe locked the note away in her desk and the making of the trousseau went on. Kinloch spoke once, laughingly, of that night in the movie theatre and never referred to it again. If he knew of Wheeler's influence, he did not betray the knowledge. It was as if a window in the girl's life had been opened—and shut.

CHAPTER XV

SO Wheeler went back to Amoa to start a fresh colony of his *Bracon beneficiens*, and Kinloch stayed in New Orleans, where he played a little polo and grumbled at the heat.

Chloe, in the midst of her trousseau getting, was farther from the man she had promised to marry than she had ever been before. Every new ribbon, every carefully adjusted bit of lace, seemed irretrievably binding. She felt herself enmeshed without a struggle. In the face of her mother's delight and Madame Lejeune's imperial satisfaction, Chloe stood passive, but she did not hold her head so high these days.

"*Mais enfin!*" said Madame Lejeune—"you are perhaps dreaming, my little one; look in the mirror of the great-great-grandmother and say who you see there."

Chloe looked in the long old mirror, and a

girl with dark, dissatisfied eyes looked back at her. The girl was lovely, beyond question. A negligée of rosy crêpe and cobweb laces draped the slim young figure. On the soft black hair a very cobweb of a cap completed the picture.

"I see Chloe Malone, but I don't see myself," said Chloe curiously. She looked at her mother and smiled. She looked at Madame Lejeune and laughed outright.

"I feel," she said, "as if it were you two Dan was marrying, not me."

"For myself," said Madame Lejeune smartly, "if I were your age, and of my own wisdom, I could make him such a wife that he would never look at you!"

Madame Lejeune had come to spend the day and assist in important decisions. She sat in a great mahogany armchair at the foot of the bed, with her ebony stick beside her, and possibly by reason of her white hair, puffed and curled, possibly by reason of her pink flowered gown, but more probably by reason of her unquenchable *chic*, she looked for all the world like a Dresden shepherdess in her seventies. Only Madame Lejeune had a cynical little line at the side of the mouth, and a "come-hither"

in the eye that was not Dresden and befitted no shepherdess.

Chloe stood before the mirror, as I have said, and Chloe's tired, sweet-looking mother sat on the side of the bed with a length of pink ribbon in her hands. On the floor, with her mouth full of pins, knelt Miss Lafaye, the little sewing woman, who was accustomed to sell her fingers, her eyes and her knees for a dollar and a half a day. It was a scene to warm the cockles of any womanly woman's heart.

"You must wear it on your honeymoon," said Madame Lejeune suddenly.

The blood crept over Chloe's face.

"Six months later," the old lady continued calmly, "he will not observe it; and it should not be wasted."

"But Dan is quite mad about Chloe," Mrs. Malone objected proudly. "Always he observes her new gowns."

"He is not yet married," said Madame Lejeune.

Chloe stood quiet, back within her dreams, while the little sewing woman's fingers fluttered about her, and the two older voices disputed the relative merits of chiffon and tulle. Presently the postman's whistle came down the

street, stopped at the gate, and after an uneasy moment went on again.

"There must be a letter," murmured Mrs. Malone. She went to get it. When she came back, she put a thin square envelope into Chloe's hand.

"He writes every day, *hein?*" inquired Madame Lejeune with a pleased little grimace.

But the letter was not from Dan Kinloch. Mrs. Malone looked doubtful. She had seen the Amoa postmark.

Chloe glanced at her name in Wheeler's strong even characters and laid the letter on the table.

"Suppose I try on the blue one now, while we're about it," she said. Her voice was less uneven than her heartbeats.

Just before luncheon she had half an hour to herself in the shadowy stillness of the dining room. She read her letter then.

"Well, I'm back at Amoa," said Wheeler. It was the first word she had had from him since he left New Orleans, "—and my breeding cages are already full of *Bracons* getting ready to kill off your boll weevil. I'll bring a bigger lot of 'em this time and hope for better luck. To have them die the night before I

got into New Orleans! That was rotten, wasn't it? But as I told you, it's all in the game. I'm not taking any chances on this lot. Bringing them up by hand, as it were. You know how they travel, don't you? In a glass tube, with a leaf on which is placed drops of sugar-water for them to feed on. Of course it requires daily attention, but the game is distinctly worth the candle. I'm not saying it isn't possible that parasites may be slowly making their way from the original home to the localities in which the boll weevil has spread. Under natural conditions these parasites might eventually overtake the weevil and restore the balance, but this might take a hundred years, and it is my belief that one specific parasite introduced into the cotton States would do more good than all the accidental parasites. You understand, Chloe Malone? I'm staking a good deal on my belief in this especial bit of work I'm doing. You might say I'm staking everything. If I can get these parasites into the cotton States and get them working, I will have proved my point to the Department of Agriculture, which is almost a matter of pride with me now. Also I will have proved my point to your friend, Mr. Kinloch,—that is more important to me than he supposes.

"Also I will have proved to myself that I can do real work, not merely talk about it.

That night on the deck of the *Fortuna*, I talked to you like a prig and a demagogue, but if it turned you one inch from your path to mine, I'm not sorry. I wanted you, of course—without knowing it. That's the answer. Don't be afraid. I'm not asking you to upset your whole life for me, but— Oh, what a pal a man could have made of you, Chloe Malone, if he'd had the first chance at you!

"I didn't mean to say this—it got away from me somehow. You will remember that I began very nicely with shop. Having said it, it stands.

"If you write to me now, I'll know you'd like to have been that pal."

Chloe did not write that day, but she did the next. At the end of her letter she said boldly: "I am getting my trousseau."

She did not know why she said it, nor to what end. To ease a lingering feeling of disloyalty to Kinloch, she told him that night: "Dan, I've had a letter from Mr. Wheeler."

They were sitting on the gallery of the house on Dufossat Street, and a Mexican vine, just beginning to bud, threw queer little shadows on the moon-washed floor at their feet. Kinloch played with a tassel on Chloe's sleeve before he answered.

"Oh," he said at last, "our friend the scientist. Have you answered it yet?"

"To-day," said Chloe. She had not counted on his asking her that, but at least she would not lie about it.

"Back in Amoa, is he?" asked Kinloch after a moment.

"Yes."

"Rounding up some more little bugs?"

Chloe smothered an impulse of indignation.

"Yes, he's getting another colony ready to bring up here."

"He'll never do it," said Kinloch comfortably. When Chloe did not speak, he put his arm about her shoulders,—they were sitting together on an old green-slatted bench,—and shook her gently.

"Cunnin' Thing, I say he'll never do it. What do you think?"

"I think he will," said Chloe. She moved a little restively within his arm.

"You have a lot of faith in that chap, haven't you?" asked Kinloch slowly.

Chloe made instant and uncompromising answer. "I have."

"Well, how about me?" his tone was still that

of the indulgent lover. "How much faith have you got in me?"

"You don't do anything that needs my faith in you," said Chloe.

"Did it ever occur to you," Kinloch suggested presently, a new note in his voice, "that there are some little things you do which need my faith in *you*?"

He withdrew his arm.

"Yes," said Chloe carefully, "that had occurred to me." A curious excitement ran through her. She saw freedom as a man walking through a tunnel sees daylight, misty and green, at the end of a cylinder of darkness.

But the walls of a tunnel sometimes fall in.

"And you know I've *got* faith in you, don't you?" asked Kinloch tenderly. His arm slipped back to its former place. Presently he laughed but with an undercurrent of earnest.

"You don't like to be kissed, do you, Chloe?"

Chloe did not answer. Her face burned in the dark.

"Why is it you always turn your cheek to me?" Kinloch insisted.

"That—that is the French way," Chloe told him.

"Some day I'm going to make a real American of you," said Kinloch significantly.

Before he went home that night he reverted to the dangerous subject.

"Suppose," he said slowly, "I'd tell you I didn't want you writing to Wheeler."

It was an unfortunate phrasing of his thought. Chloe's head went up at once.

"I'd remind you," she said coldly, "that I'm still Chloe Malone."

Kinloch laughed like a big boy, catching her unwilling hands and crushing them between his own.

"Cunnin' Thing!" he said, "when you're mad, you're so pretty I could eat you. Do it again."

But Chloe did not do it again.

At the top of the steps Kinloch stopped once more.

"How are the flub-dubs coming?" he inquired gravely.

Chloe said she was so tired of looking at ribbons and lace that she thought she should like to go in sackcloth for a change. She said it nervously and truthfully.

"Never mind, we'll get away from 'em all pretty soon and forget there's anybody in the

world but you and me," said Kinloch softly.

It ought to have opened a vista of Arcady to Chloe's eyes. She shut those eyes tightly, however, for the space of a second which might have been filled with rosy ardors and wasn't.

Kinloch, holding her hand, looked at her keenly.

"Chloe," he said in a low voice, "we've got to set the day, you know."

"I know," said Chloe.

She was still trembling before the vision Kinloch had conjured, of going away from them all, forgetting that there was any one else in the world but herself and him.

"June?" said Kinloch, while the waves on the beach at Amoa whispered in Chloe's ears.

"June is next month!" she told him, "Oh, I couldn't. It isn't possible, Dan."

"Then, July," said Kinloch. "It's got to be July!" His red hair was copper-bronze in the moonlight. His eyes were eager and his mouth was rather lovable. Nine out of every ten girls in Chloe's acquaintance would have whispered "July" and thanked the Fates. But life is a curious tangle, and the moon she had watched from the deck of the *Fortuna* still burned upon Chloe's inner sight.

"Not to-night," she said almost pleadingly. "Don't ask me to say it to-night, Dan. Wait."

So Kinloch waited. He did not, however, mean to wait for long, and Chloe knew it.

That night her mother called to her as she was coming up the stairs: "Chloe, come here, *chère!*"

And Chloe went into her mother's room.

CHAPTER XVI

MRS. MALONE was sitting in a chair beside the table, with the lamplight full on her bent head, and the sheer embroidered beauty of a nainsook nightgown across her lap. She did not stop sewing until Chloe leaned over her and took the needle from her fingers; then she drew a little breath of relief.

"It is late, *hein?* Dan has gone?"

"He's gone," said Chloe; her voice quivered a little. "And darlingest, if you want to break my heart square in two, you will please continue to sew on that stuff at night."

Mrs. Malone looked surprised.

She smiled and stretched her fingers and yawned delicately. She was of the generation and the class which always preferred to cover a yawn with a fan.

"Why, *chère?*" she inquired. "I have sewed at night many times before."

"Don't talk about it," said Chloe, a little

wildly. "I know you have. I know I've let you do it too—"

"*Cré misère!*" said her mother. "You could not have stopped me." She patted Chloe's cheek with small roughened fingers. "Never mind. Now it is to be all different. Dan says he is going to buy you a new lim-ou-sine and give me the old one." She laughed softly. "And I will have my breakfast in bed every day. He is a sweet boy, that Dan."

"You're—you're very fond of him, aren't you?" asked Chloe. She sat down on the floor at her mother's knees and leaned her head against that familiar refuge.

"As my own son," said Mrs. Malone. She sighed happily. "To love and not be poor, *Bébé*—it is what I have prayed for, for you. Now, no one can ever tell me that the good Saint Anthony does not answer."

Chloe had nothing whatever to say about the good Saint Anthony.

"If you love, are you ever poor?" she demanded suddenly. Only one man in all the world might have read her eyes in that moment.

"No," said her mother simply, "because when you are poor, there is very soon no more love."

And Chloe could not answer. What could she say? She knew quite well that her mother's married life had begun with love and wealth and ended with poverty and next to no love at all. Chloe had been but three years old when her father died, but she could remember vaguely many quarrels; and once, when she was twelve, she had come upon an old letter of her father's in a trunk in the store-room. With a child's naïve curiosity she had read half of one yellowed page before she remembered her training and laid the letter down. But the half-page had been burned into her consciousness. She never forgot it.

"You will make life a burden," Dennis Malone had written, "with your money—money—money! and for what? To pay off a few blitherin' bills. Let 'em wait! I married a woman, my dear—not a bill-collector."

With her eyes half shut, Chloe thought of that letter now, and her mouth hardened.

Right or wrong, her father had been a lover, with his money,—an embittered man without it. Right or wrong, her mother had suffered, and if her mother saw happiness ahead of her now, was she, Chloe, to shut that door in her mother's face?

"Dan," said Chloe abruptly, "wants me to marry him in July."

"Oh, you have promised?" Mrs. Malone inquired quickly.

"Not yet," said Chloe.

"But you will?"

"Ye-es, I think so."

Mrs. Malone kissed the satin softness of the head upon her knees, and Chloe kissed her mother's stroking hand with a sort of fierce tenderness. They clung together wordlessly, —two women making the best of their lives to the best of their different abilities.

"Will what I can give—will the limousine and breakfasts in bed and all that—make up to you," Chloe asked unsteadily, "for all you've given up for me?"

"Wait," said Mrs. Malone very softly, "until there is another little Chloe, and you will know why I am long ago paid."

Chloe shivered and hid her face. Presently she went to bed.

But the conversation stayed in her mother's mind. Next day Mrs. Malone, in a brief respite from cutting and fitting, put on her hat, and sheltering herself with a parasol and fan, without which she never took her walks abroad,

went down to Esplanade Street to see Madame Lejeune.

She found that delightful personage in the depths of her elaborate bedroom, with the blinds half down, reading Anatole France and eating candied ginger.

"Oh, is it you?" said Madame Lejeune affectionately. "You look warm, my cousin. Sit there and tell me why so early in the day you come galloping down to see me. Chloe has perhaps broken her engagement?"

"But, no!" cried Chloe's mother in horror.

"No?" echoed Madame Lejeune politely. "It is not, however, impossible. She is somewhat of an *incroyable*, my little one. She is beginning to think. We had better get her safely married before she thinks too much."

Mrs. Malone fanned herself nervously beneath the piercing gaze of Madame Lejeune's black eyes, and murmured that she knew Dan would make Chloe happy.

"I doubt!" said Madame Lejeune cryptically. She leaned back in her big carved chair and looked at her visitor out of half-closed eyes. Her white hair was combed high; no one ever saw it otherwise. She wore a flowing gown of some remarkable flowered silk, and there

were a great many rings on her little withered hands. She tapped her crook-topped ebony cane on the floor as she spoke.

"Chloe will be safe with young Kinloch. That is why I wish her to marry him."

"And happy," the mother persisted.

Madame Lejeune sniffed. "There is no such thing in the world as happiness," she said crossly, "but you cannot tell that to Youth. The most you can do is to build fences around Youth and keep it out of the ditches. You will have luncheon with me?"

Mrs. Malone demurred faintly. "I came to tell you," she said, "that Dan desires to marry Chloe in July. I think she will consent."

"Oh, *la Princesse* consents, eh?" cried Madame Lejeune, all at once in high good humor. "That will perhaps settle the young man who hunts for bugs in the jungle."

"What do you mean?" asked Mrs. Malone sharply. "You think that Chloe—"

Madame Lejeune saw her indiscretion and retrieved it magnificently.

"*Soyez tranquille!* I think that Chloe has her little fancies, no more. Was Dennis Malone the only man you ever regarded?"

"But yes," said Mrs. Malone simply.

"Well, you are by nature a monogamist," said the wicked old lady, selecting a fresh piece of ginger from the little crystal jar on the table beside her. "I am not. And I am not so sure of Chloe. That is why I wish to see her safely a married woman."

"But Mr. Wheeler? You do not think—"

"He has a mind," Madame Lejeune interrupted. "That sees itself—and a certain something about the eyes. Even I have remembered a tone of his voice, and that is something at my age. He does not need Chloe; he is not of the sort that a woman will make or unmake, but if he had Kinloch's fortune—"

"You make us seem mer-ce-nary," begged Mrs. Malone, deeply distressed.

"And for what should we be afraid to look ourselves in the face," retorted Madame Lejeune. There the matter rested.

Meantime Chloe had had it out with herself, and as a result of her soul-searching, she wrote to Kinloch.

"After all," she said in not the first nor the second nor yet the third attempt, "after all, I think July it is. I'm sorry I put you off the other night, Dan. I only wanted time to think."

That, she considered, was what the situation demanded of her, no more, no less. She had never told Kinloch that she loved him. She had told him she did not believe in love except as a sort of wonderful ephemeral adventure. She had explained to him her theory regarding comradeship and simple liking as a basis for marriage, and upon this particular marriage, it now appeared, depended very materially the happiness of her household.

"Very well, then," said Chloe, set her teeth, signed her letter, and sent it off.

Kinloch came to her, of course, as soon as he laid hands upon her scribbled page, and Chloe forced herself to be the willing betrothed that he expected. She was waiting all this time for the inevitable, second letter from Amoa, and inevitably it came.

There were three pages about the *Bracon*, curt, businesslike, friendly, without a trace of any inner feeling. Chloe read line after line with a little breathless hush in her consciousness. He said that his parasites were thriving, that he planned a second trip to New Orleans about the end of June, and that this time he thought he would succeed in transporting the insects. Then his signature and at the bottom

of the page "over," Chloe turned the page and read:

"I'm going to take myself out of your life with this—if I was ever in it—I don't seem to want to hear about that trousseau. I hope you'll be very happy, but I shall continue to think that you might have gotten more out of life along other lines. Even in the little time I've known you, you've been an inspiration and an impetus to me—if you care to hear it. Good-by—and good luck, little pal!"

When she came to those last two words, Chloe lifted her head and the color flamed into her cheeks. Nothing Kinloch had ever said to her—nothing her world had ever had to offer—seemed real, in comparison with that royal accolade. That was the core of living. Not money, not position, not ease, not love-in-idleness, but the man and the woman working together, the utter, unspoken comradeship of the fight, fought shoulder to shoulder, his labor her most intimate concern and his achievement her decoration for battle.

"Good-by and good luck, little pal!"

Chloe looked at the words through blinding tears, then locked the letter into a little drawer

of her desk and kissed the key before she hid it away.

"I wish he knew," she thought drearily, "what a pal I could have been to him! He doesn't even know I care. He'll go on working and doing big things, and he can't tell me. I shan't be able to hear about them. I know now what's real in life, but I'll have to go on with my parties and dressmakers just the same."

She put her hands to her eyes, and the tears were hot on her fingers. "Life isn't fair," she thought, "Life isn't fair!" Then she remembered the touch of his hand and hid her face deeper. It had been only a touch and now would never be anything more.

"Chloe, my dear," she said to herself rather grimly, "I think we'd better shut the door on that."

So she did, and her eyes were brave, but something badly hurt stayed in the depths of them.

However, the world at large has very little concern for the doors that a girl may shut on the Things That Are Not To Be. Chloe's world went on much the same as usual. The postman passed or stopped, and the fact that he

brought no more letters from Amoa troubled him not at all. The telephone rang with the same imperative summons, but no curt friendly voice came out of the mysterious void. Kinloch's tones were deep and drawling, of a quite different quality.

Chloe went into the movie theater on Canal Street, one day, the one into which she and Wheeler had gone the night before he left New Orleans. She sat as near as she could come to their former place, and the same feverish orchestra played *Peu d'Amour*, but the experiment was futile and brought nothing back to her. She came out into the daylight lonelier than before.

Mrs. Malone observed a certain wistful uneasiness about her beloved's footsteps. She put out a delicate feeler, remembering Madame Lejeune's dark hint.

"You have not a letter from Mr. Wheeler in a long time?"

"I am not going to have any more," said Chloe concisely and kissed her mother's cheek. Which told Mrs. Malone little or nothing of what she wished to know.

Madame Lejeune cut deeper. She sent for Chloe one day, the second week in June, and

kissed her when she came. They exchanged compliments gravely.

"Sit down," said Madame Lejeune at last.

Chloe sat down in the big carved chair, the arms of which ended in elephants' heads, and took off her hat, flinging it on to the table. She passed a hand across her forehead and ruffled her hair. She looked pale and a little tired.

"You begin," said Madame Lejeune kindly, "to look like the usual bride."

"I don't feel it," Chloe retorted with a quiver of amusement at the underlying truth.

Madame Lejeune surveyed her godchild through a new lorgnette of platinum set with brilliants.

"So you have decided on July?"

"The twenty-second."

"But you do not announce the date yet."

"I'll send it to the papers the end of this month," said Chloe listlessly.

"Ah!" said Madame Lejeune. "Hand me that box on the table beside you."

Chloe lifted a box of dull green leather and crossed the room with it obediently. She laid it in Madame Lejeune's lap. The shrivelled little fingers fumbled with the catch and flung

the box open. Upon a cushion of purple velvet, dull with age, lay a string of pearls, not large but fit for the throat of Ariadne.

Madame Lejeune lifted out the string and held it for one moment against her delicately rouged old cheek.

"*Dieu te beni*, my little loved one!" she said at length, with a pitiful break in her voice, and clasped the necklace about Chloe's neck.

Presently the old lady felt for her handkerchief.

"Like fools," she said tersely, "we weep. I had meant it for your wedding day, but I am an old child. I could not wait."

Chloe clung to her in silence, queerly unnerved.

"The man who gave me those pearls is dead," said Madame Lejeune. "Long years dead. He was the heart of my heart, and I loved him, but before ever I knew him he was promised—to a little pink-faced cat—and a gentleman keeps his word." The old lady cleared her throat huskily. "We are like that, the women of our family; we love the wrong man—or too late. I have never seen it otherwise." Like lightning out a clear sky she flung her question into Chloe's face.

"You love this Kinloch you are going to marry?"

"I told him," said Chloe stubbornly, "when I promised, that I did not believe in love as a foundation for marriage." The words had begun to seem to her like a formula. "I like him well enough to marry him."

"*Bien!*" said Madame Lejeune. "Is there any one else?"

Chloe got up, she had been kneeling beside her godmother's chair,—and stood straight and slender, her hands clenched at her sides.

The pearls lay lucent about her soft smooth throat. Just for one moment her eyes burned with a fierce ecstasy of pride.

"I don't have to tell you,—you *know*," she said distinctly.

"I desired to be certain," said Madame Lejeune.

She stared across the room and into Heaven knows what forgotten tragedy of youth, while Chloe snapped the lid upon the green leather box and laid it with fingers that trembled a little back upon the table.

CHAPTER XVII

THREE days after Madame Lejeune gave Chloe the string of pearls in the green leather case, a new maid of the Esplanade Street *ménage* opened the door of the old lady's room without knocking and received no reprimand. Before the dressing table, her head sunk upon her breast, the sun glinting heartlessly upon all the little instruments of her daily rejuvenescence, Madame Lejeune sat dead.

It was a scene for a Hogarth; the tiny figure in its garment of flowered silk, the silver and ivory of the dressing table, the mirror giving back the gleam of that elaborately coiffed white hair, and, upon the floor, a novel, its leaves crushed open where it had fallen from the lap of the dead woman.

Fort Comme la Mort was the name, in gold letters, on the peacock blue cover of the book. The new maid ran shrieking from the room and presently brought a doctor, but Madame

Lejeune was out of his reach, a grim little smile upon her lips, her never very thoroughly satisfied heart quite still.

The doctor sent in all haste for Mrs. Malone and Chloe. When they came, he wagged a consolatory head.

"You have never heard her speak of any heart trouble?"

Mrs. Malone between her sobs said no. Chloe wept less violently. She seemed and felt a little dazed. It was the first time, within her memory, that death had become a material fact for her to touch and gaze upon. Her tears came with a rush when she looked at that small withered face, decently composed against the lacy pillow of Madame Lejeune's pink-covered bed.

The old cook brought a white rose from the garden and laid it on the pillow beside the whiter cheek. But the white rose only accentuated rather cruelly the terrible mantle of old age which had fallen in one hour of death upon that small silent figure. Madame Lejeune had been like an eighteenth-century marquise, a deliciously wicked one who knew how to stave off Time; dead, she was only a very very tired-looking little old woman, no longer beau-

tiful, her eyes close-shut, the lines in her face deep-graven.

Chloe never forgot the first few hours in that darkened house. Merciful however, youth rebounds. At the end of a week, the first sharp edge of grief dulled, life took on a commoner cast; and when a month had gone, it was hard to realize that things were not as they had always been.

The day that Madame Lejeune died, Kinloch had come to Chloe, and she had wept in his arms.

"If only I could take you away—where you'd forget. I can't bear to see you like this," he told her restlessly. "Chloe, can't you marry me—now—without waiting?"

But Chloe had drawn away from him, her tear-filled eyes deep with reproach.

"She was my godmother, Dan. Oh, Dan! How can you! We must wait all the longer."

Afterwards she questioned herself savagely if that longer wait were not only too welcome. She had had no letter from Wheeler since the one in which he wished her good-luck and good-by, but she knew that her heart still missed a beat at the sound of the postman's whistle. It is not easy, this locking the door

between yourself and the man whom you think might have that heart in his two hands.

The trousseau-making went on. Snowy piles of garments lay in a trunk in the Malone attic, scented with lily of the valley and laced with rosy ribbons.

"If only I could give you the trousseau I wish!" sighed Mrs. Malone.

Out of a blue sky and as unexpected as dogwood in October came the answer to that prayer. When Madame Lejeune's will was read, one month and one week after the day on which she died, it was found that it was a new will. Madame Lejeune had left half of all of which she died possessed, something over fifty thousand dollars, to Mrs. Malone, half to her church, nothing to a horde of angry connections, to Chloe, only a letter.

Mrs. Malone fainted, quietly, but with an astonishing thoroughness, when the news was broken to her. So long she had fought for one dollar at a time, her mind refused to grasp the enormity of the fact that never again need she consider the cheaper cuts of meat, the bargain sales, the unquestioning denial of little pleasures, all the agonizing economies of the woman who must make one piece of silver do

the work of two. When she came out of her faint, she cried bitterly. The first purchase that she had charged on her new accounts was a little French enamelled watch for Chloe, the second an offering to Saint Anthony, the third, a black silk petticoat for herself. Chloe was wild with happiness over her mother's good fortune. It did not occur to her at once that behind such a will Madame Lejeune must have had some strong ulterior motive. When it did occur to her, she read her letter again and understood.

"My little one," said Madame Lejeune, with characteristic directness.

"I have made a new will and I am leaving half of all I have to your mother. She has enough now to make her comfortable for the rest of her life. She need not depend on you. You are free to make your own mistakes. Say a prayer for my soul when you read this. I have left you the gift of choice.

"Your devoted godmother.

"AMELIE LEJEUNE.

There was of course a postscript.

"I would advise you—but I wish you to be grateful to me."

Chloe came down from the reading of that letter with her eyes burning. She saw herself, indeed, free to make her own mistakes. She kissed the string of pearls she wore and cried a little. It was no longer necessary for her to marry where her mother might best be provided for. Mrs. Malone was now wealthy beyond any question of further need. Chloe's old debt was paid, and not out of Chloe's pocket. Herself and no other would now be affected by her marrying wisely or ill.

Before a photograph of Madame Lejeune in evening gown, with a feather in her hair and the ghost of a cynical smile on her lips, Chloe lifted clasped hot hands and whispered:

"You knew, didn't you, dear? I'll be grateful to you all my life."

But all one's life is not so simple a matter. Kinloch had come to the place where he was not to be put off any longer.

"Don't you *want* to marry me?" he asked Chloe that night. He caught her hand and kissed it hard. "Chloe, what's the matter? Don't you *want* to marry me?"

It is humanly impossible to tell a man who asks you with that sort of look in his eyes and that sort of tone in his voice the thing that is

going to wipe the radiance from his face. Chloe temporized. I am not excusing her. She had been bred to please the men who came into her world, not to overthrow them, and she was by sex-instinct a coward. Also, when she was with Kinloch, his personality had its own effect upon her, however slight. Otherwise, she could never have promised to marry him in the first place. She would not let him kiss her mouth, but his kiss on her cheek offended her not at all. His arms about her, on the day that her godmother died, had been strong and warm and comforting. They spoke of life, and they seemed to keep the ugly facts of age and death at a distance.

If it had not been for Courtenay Wheeler, with his stubborn splendid hunger for work, and his curt cool voice, and his scorn in the beginning and his rare flush of tenderness later on, I am not saying but what Chloe might never have quarrelled with her apparent destiny. The easiest way is sometimes an irreproachably respectable way which makes it all the more difficult to resist.

So Chloe was still when she might have spoken, and that opportunity passed forever.

"I'm going to take you to Paris," said Kin-

loch, her hand still at his lips. "You want to see Paris, don't you? Or had you rather go to London first?"

"Oh, Paris!" said Chloe rapturously, before she thought, which made the aftermath of course a sickening futility. Paris! She thought of Wheeler and Amoa!

The Paris of *La Vie de Boheme* (Chloe knew her French opera by heart) and the strip of ragged crescent beach with the mountains up behind it! Town and desert, life and loneliness, blinking jewelled lights and empty terrifying darkness—but Wheeler's hand in the darkness, and Kinloch's face beneath the lights.

"You are free," Madame Lejeune had written, "to make your own mistakes." As if any haggling soul of us were ever free, for long!

"You'd like Paris, wouldn't you?" asked Kinloch adoringly. He went on to tell her of the jewels he would buy for her and the gowns she should wear. He had no thought of bribing her; that was only his method of expression.

"You beautiful child!" he said. "Cunnin' Thing, do you know how absolutely lovely you are?"

"How should I know?" she mocked him.

"I can see you," he told her dreamily, "in a gown the color of one of those roses and a big black hat with feathers."

Chloe said that was typically a masculine costuming, but she looked at the roses and sighed softly.

"And all the other women in the restaurants will turn to stare after you," said Kinloch, stroking her fingers, "and all the men will be jealous of *me*. And I can afford to laugh at 'em, can't I? Knowing it's me that's going to be with you—forever."

His grip on her fingers hurt by its suddenness. His voice at her ear was a little hoarse.

Chloe snatched her hand free and walked over to the window that opened into a star-lit darkness. The drawing-room was cool and still. Kinloch's roses stood in the old Chinese bowl beneath the steel engraving of Charlotte Corday, and from the fireplace a great mass of black and green cedar sent out a cleanly fragrance. The lamplight fell on Kinloch's red hair, on the laughing ardor of his eyes.

"Come back. I'll be good."

"Is that a promise?"

"Promise."

Chloe went back and sat down upon the sofa beside him. She folded her hands in her lap.

"Listen!" said Kinloch suddenly. "I had a look at the Begbie house to-day. How'd you like to live in it—after we get back?"

"That big white house near the Park?" Chloe exclaimed incredulously. In spite of herself, her eyes shone at a sudden visualization of stately pillars and alluring little balconies above a terrace set with dwarf orange trees and hydrangeas.

"Why, Dan, you must be mad; that's a horribly expensive place."

"I can manage it," said Kinloch simply, "if you think you'd like it."

"Oh, *like* it!"

"Begbie's going to England to live. I talked to him to-day. The up-keep of the place isn't so bad as you'd think, and it's got wonderful possibilities. A big, raftered dining room—hardwood floors clean across the place. Great for dancing." He added frankly: "I'd rather buy than build, wouldn't you? Saves an awful lot of trouble with architects and decorators."

Chloe allowed herself to play with the Arabian-nights' possibility of the thing. She leaned

back in her corner of the sofa, hands clasped, eyes brilliant.

"It would take a menagerie of servants."

"Begbie keeps five."

"Of course you have your car, already."

"I'm going to get you an electric for yourself, too."

"You're like Satan," said Chloe unexpectedly, "showing all the kingdoms of the world."

Kinloch only laughed. The real significance of the allusion got safely past him.

"Well," he grinned, "what's life for?"

"What *is it for*?" Chloe echoed him moodily.

"For loving."

"No—no! Truly, Dan, what is it for, to you?"

He looked at her, shaking his head.

"You won't let me show you. I'm not one of these sad-eyed philosophers who can't see the good old sun. Life's a pretty nice thing to me. I like people. I like playing around. I don't like to work, and thanks to the old man I don't have to. If I can make you happy, that's all the work I care for."

His final avowal, half laughing, half tender, brought a shade to her eyes, but she urged him wistfully.

"You aren't ambitious, at all, Dan?"

"Isn't it ambition to want to make the girl you love, happy?"

Chloe flung out both hands in a gesture of helplessness, but there was a weakening fibre in her insistence and she knew it—none better.

"You know the old saying," Kinloch reminded her cheerfully; "you can't make a silk purse out of a piggie's ear. No more can you make a socialist out of me."

"Nobody wants to make a socialist out of you."

Chloe was laughing unwillingly.

"That's good," he accepted. "I'll have you converted to my creed before you know it."

"I'm afraid of just that," said Chloe. In her heart she was.

CHAPTER XVIII

LATER in the evening Kinloch spoke of Madame Lejeune's will.

"They tell me it was dated only two days before her death. You saw her, didn't you, about that time?"

"I saw her three days before she died. You know she gave me her pearls then."

Chloe's lip trembled. She was still unable to think of those tiny jewel-laden hands as folded and still. She let Kinloch put a sympathetic arm about her shoulders.

"It is a wonderful thing for your mother," he suggested reverently. "Think of the fun she can have with that money. But I'm a little bit jealous. I want to do things for her, myself."

"You're—you're very fond of mother, aren't you?"

"We're regular pals," he boasted tenderly. It was all very well for Madame Lejeune to

think she had left her godchild free. Chloe felt the pull of the nets.

After Kinloch had gone that night, she sat for a long time by her bedroom window, thinking and contriving and questioning in the dark. For one thing, Mrs. Malone did not know, had never suspected, that Chloe's engagement to Kinloch had anything to do with herself. It would not be easily made plain to Mrs. Malone that the mother's freedom from almost poverty freed the daughter from any reason for marrying Kinloch. Equally Kinloch did not know, could not in any decent self-respecting way be made to know, that the girl who had promised to marry him did not now need his money for her mother, and so did not now need to marry him. Further still, Kinloch and Chloe's mother were regular pals. Chloe had there to cut into the quick.

Outside of all this, there was the trousseau, the talk, the possible scandal attendant upon so prominent a broken engagement and, over and beyond everything else, Wheeler had never asked Chloe to marry him. Chloe had, in black and white, no reason for supposing Wheeler would ever ask her. A fine tangle for pretty, useless hands to cope with!

Madame Lejeune had suspected, had, at the last, undoubtedly seen, but Madame Lejeune was gone beyond the possibility of seeing any farther.

Chloe got into bed and lay there staring at nothing. When Kinloch had spoken of Paris, undoubtedly a freshened current had sped along her veins. And the big white house on the Avenue!

"Are you selling yourself for *that*?" she cried to a mind that ran in circles. Then she shut her eyes and drifted. After all, when the line of least resistance meant happiness for two people, ease for herself and wounding for none, since Wheeler thought of her as gone already—

"Good-by, and good luck, little pal!" That was what he had written her.

Chloe fell asleep in the midst of a waking dream in which Wheeler came to her smiling and said, laying his cheek on her's:

"Off for the jungle to-night; have you packed my boots?"

And Chloe packed his boots and went off to the jungle gladly—in the dream.

Notwithstanding which, she had breakfast in bed next morning, because her head ached a

very little. It is such contrasts that make life interesting. So Chloe, to whom her god-mother had left the gift of choice, considered that her hands were still tied and continued to drift. Strangely enough, she liked Kinloch better, now that no combination of circumstances made him essential to her future. She supposed she might dream, and did, but dreaming got the jungle no nearer. Meantime the days passed, and it was nearing the end of July.

No word came from Wheeler, very naturally. He had said that he planned to bring the second colony of *Bracon Beneficiens* to New Orleans about the end of June, and Chloe tormented herself at times because she had heard nothing more of him. Kinloch, she knew, would undoubtedly have spoken of the other man's arrival if he had appeared in the city. Silence suggested more ill luck and even failure.

Chloe added an agony of uncertainty to her other mental exercises. She would not look at the entomological books on her table because they brought back all too vividly Wheeler's voice and eyes. She flung herself headlong into the current that ran nearest her. Kin-

loch had never to complain, in these days, of lack of companionship.

Madame Lejeune's death, however, had served to postpone the final decision of the wedding day. Chloe scarcely knew if she were glad or sorry. She had moments of wishing the whole thing were over, that the decision no longer rested with her. She was a little tired of the strain, more than a little inclined to let herself go with the stream.

For back of her self-dissection and analysis, her rather pitiful attempts to stake out for herself the real values and the false, back of her struggle to keep love, the wonderful adventure, a thing outside of expediency, back of all this were the silk-stockinged generations responsible for her being. Through them in her veins flowed the desire for the soft places of life, the love of jewels, and the ache for silk next the skin. It is hard to fight against the dead. Chloe's great-great-grandmother, the lady of the mirror, had had her slave girls; and Chloe's father once said that he had rather be drowned than poor. Oh, Chloe had her battlefield! Most of us have.

One day, in the last week of July, Kinloch came to the house on Dufossat Street with a

key in his hand and the smile of an eager boy in his eyes.

"Mother Malone!" he called from the foot of the stairs. The front door was open, hopeless of a breeze. "Chloe Malone! Where are you? Come here! I want you."

Chloe peeped over the upper railing, and Mrs. Malone's soft eyes looked over her shoulder.

Kinloch flourished the key.

"Come on! I've got the machine outside."

"What for, silly?" Chloe demanded warily.

"We are not dress—" smiled Mrs. Malone.

"Get your bonnets on, then," said Kinloch, "and powder your noses. Hurry now. I've got a house I want you to look at."

He displayed a touch of pride.

"Oh!" said Chloe, "Dan!"

"Make her hurry, Mother Malone," Kinloch pleaded. He walked up and down the hall, smiling, his hands in his pockets, till the two women appeared at the head of the stairs. They came down like sisters, Chloe slim and lovely in a white gown and simple black hat, her mother, cool as a cloud, in fine black organdie.

"You look a peach. Is that one of the new

frocks?" Kinloch inquired instantly, and kissed the mother's softly flushing cheek. He stooped boldly to Chloe, but she evaded him laughing.

Mr. Timson, the postman, was waiting at the gate. He nodded and touched his cap, his dry old face creasing in a smile.

"One for you, Miss Chloe. Sorry that's the best I can do to-day."

"Better than nothing," said Chloe sweetly. She never failed to smile on Mr. Timson, who adored her proportionately. The letter was thin and rather soiled, addressed in an uncertain hand but with merciless accuracy. Chloe glanced at it carelessly and thrust it into the little bag of black moire that she carried. She was conscious of a definite excitement with regard to the house they were going to see. When the car stopped before the terrace on which stood the dwarf orange trees and hydrangeas, she gave a little cry of delight.

"Dan, it *is* the Begbie house!"

"Yes'm," said Kinloch, with hypocritical modesty. "How does it look to *you*, Mother Malone?"

The three went up the concrete walk, up the wide steps, and stopped at the fine Colonial

door which Kinloch opened with the key that he held in his hand.

"The Begbies are across the lake," he explained, "and I thought I'd like you all to have a look. I haven't said anything definite to Begbie yet. Some hall, isn't it?"

It was undoubtedly some hall. Chloe caught her breath in sheer pleasure, and Mrs. Malone uttered a little gasp.

Before them, out of a room magnificently simple, a white staircase rose to a landing and from there to upper regions of undoubted enchantment. The handrail was mahogany, perfect and shining.

"I *love* that staircase," said Chloe softly. She felt a wave of longing come over her for things that shining handrail typified; fine table-linens and dully glowing rugs, silver and crystal and the glint of aluminum in a kitchen as orderly as an operating room.

"I didn't know I was so domestic," she murmured, laughing, a little bewildered.

"Do you think you'd like to live here?" asked Kinloch. He had come up behind her very softly. "Cunnin' Thing, I can see you on that stairway."

His was a contagious dream. Chloe could

see herself on that stairway. Presently, when they had crossed the hall and entered the drawing-room, she could see herself there as well, trailing lace and fur across the polished floor, standing between the rose-hung windows. She could see herself at the head of the wonderful table in the dining room too, and there was a little room up-stairs with a *chaise-longue* and a rosewood desk, with a few adorable prints on the wall and savage little bronze firedogs in the open fireplace, a room with hangings of old rose and blue, in which she could see herself clearest of all.

It was at the door of this room, that Kinloch, behind Mrs. Malone's discreetly averted shoulders, caught Chloe and kissed her.

"If you could *see* yourself," he reiterated, "against those curtains!"

That time Chloe scarcely felt his kiss. She moved in a haze of sensuous satisfaction. All the luxury-loving instincts of her race were awake in her. If Kinloch was mad with Chloe's loveliness, then Chloe was mad with the loveliness of this place he offered for her dwelling. She stood at that moment on no plane from which to look down upon him. Something, the keenness of her excitement

likely, tired her a little, and she dropped into a deep-cushioned chair that stood on the landing when her mother and Kinloch started down the stairs again. They did not miss Chloe. Mrs. Malone was enlarging ecstatically upon the practical beauties of the house, Kinloch walked beside her, his arm linked in hers like a lover. Chloe thought, as she watched them down the stairs, how near they seemed, each to the other, and she smiled a little. Kinloch's feeling for her mother never failed of its mark.

She sat for a little while lost in comfort, her thoughts blurring before the material appeal of the things about her; then she remembered all at once the letter that Mr. Timson had given her, and drew it out of her bag, and opened it with a pretty, languid forefinger.

Mrs. Malone in Kinloch's convoy was inspecting the kitchen and laundry. The beautiful house was still as a moonless night.

With a frown between her eyes, Chloe stared at the single sheet open between her fingers. She had supposed that the letter might be an advertising circular, or a bill. It was neither. To begin with, it was not written in English at all, not even in French, but in a language

which Chloe did not know, and which vaguely she guessed to be Spanish. It had neither beginning nor end, and Chloe had looked it twice over (it had, all told, not more than ten or fifteen lines) before about the middle of the page, scrawling and indistinct, two words deciphered, leaped out to her. "—Señor Wheeler.—"

It is a trite phrase which says a heart turns over in one's breast. Chloe sat there, her eyes on those two words, which alone she could understand, and the color faded out of her face as it fades from the sky when the dark comes on.

Knowing nothing of what those feeble black scratches on the half-soiled paper might have to say to her, she yet began to tremble. She was sick with a sense of impending disaster. The beautiful walls rose about and above her like a prison. Her mind leaped to one grinding, utterly illogical conclusion.

"He is dead—and I was looking at a house to live in—with another man."

Then she heard Kinloch's voice in the hall below, and some instinct of self-defense made her put the letter back into her bag with shaking fingers.

When her mother and Kinloch got to the stairs, she met them, coming down.

"Chloe! What's the matter?" Kinloch cried sharply.

"I—I want to go home," said Chloe.

Her face was white, and her lips moved stiffly.

She would not even let her mother put her arm around her.

"I'm all right," she told them, "only—I want to go home."

She was searching wildly in her mind for some one who should read her that miserably written page. She did not so much as look again at the curving stairway. She did not even hear the key in the lock of the beautiful house. She walked between the dwarf orange trees and the blue hydrangeas and never saw them.

"Hurry, please!" she said huskily to Kinloch, when she was once more in the car beside her mother. So Kinloch, a trifle frightened and more than a trifle disappointed, took Chloe and Mrs. Malone back to the house on Dufossat Street. Mr. Timson, his rounds completed, passed them at the corner with an empty bag.

CHAPTER XIX

MRS. MALONE was mixing orange-flower water for Chloe. Into half a glass of iced water she stirred a spoonful of the fragrant syrup and looked at it anxiously, her head on one side. She had not yet taken off her hat, and the dust of the terrace of the beautiful house which Kinloch had taken them to see still clung to her shoes. When she had tasted the orange-flower water and found it to her satisfaction, she went swiftly up the stairs with it, and Chloe met her at the head of them.

Chloe also was still wearing her hat. In one hand she carried her gloves and a letter.

"Here, Chloe," Mrs. Malone urged softly, "I have brought you some orange-flower water. You will feel better—"

"Darlingest," said Chloe, "I don't need it," but she drank the *tisane* obediently. She was still very pale from the shock the letter had given her, but there was a look of strong determination in her eyes.

"I am going out for a little while," she explained, as soon as she had emptied the glass.

"But where—" began Mrs. Malone.

Chloe hesitated. She made a little gesture of decision.

"To see Father Manuel."

The glass, emptied of the orange-flower water, returned to its giver. Mother and daughter touched hands, unsmiling.

"Chloe—there is some trouble—let me go with you."

Chloe caught up her mother's hand and kissed her mother's cheek.

"It may be nothing at all. I am only a little worried. And you are going to stay right here. I shan't be gone long. Please—darlingest! You'll have to trust me."

So Mrs. Malone stayed home, and presently the gate clicked behind Chloe's wayfaring.

Take it by and large, a goodly part of Mrs. Malone's existence had been spent in staying home, while first her husband and then her child went out to the making of their respective histories. It is a simple part but not necessarily an easy one. The home-keeping heart which hangs on the latchstring and listens for the return of every errant footstep that has

gone forth is not always the happiest. Mrs. Malone had learned to wait for the inevitable, but she had never learned to enjoy the waiting.

As for Chloe, before she turned the first corner, she had forgotten everything but the letter she held in her hand. A creeping fire was in her veins. Her eyes saw only Wheeler's name standing out from the ill-written page of alien syllables. Her feet could not go fast enough. She was out of breath and trembling when she came to Father Manuel's house, with its clump of red roses at the steps, and its little pot of maidenhair fern on the table in the hallway.

Father Manuel was at home. He met Chloe in the door of his study, took her hand, and drew her in. He was a kindly-seeming old man with tired brown eyes and little lines of pain about his mouth.

"Your mother!" he said instantly, with a look of keen concern. "She is not ill?"

Chloe forced a smile.

"No, Father, she's perfectly well. It's I—I want to see you. There is something I want you to do for me."

She made herself seem less urgent, held herself in leash.

"Sit down, my child," said Father Manuel,

"and tell me what it's all about." He looked at Chloe with a paternal friendliness. He had christened her and given her her first communion. He fully expected to bless her eventually in marriage, and this cycle of her life was fair to his eyes.

"Father, you speak Spanish, don't you?" asked Chloe abruptly.

The old man nodded his head, smiling.

"I was born in Cuba."

"I have a letter," said Chloe. She spoke as slowly as her racing heart would let her, "a letter written in Spanish—and I am very curious. I can't read it. I want you to read it for me. I thought of you just a little while ago, and I came to you at once."

Father Manuel adjusted a pair of steel-rimmed spectacles.

"Let me see," he said simply.

Chloe took her letter out of its envelope and put it into the old man's hands. She was careful not to touch his fingers, for she knew that her own were cold. She bit her lips to keep the color in them and looked out of the window with dark terrified eyes. She was afraid that Father Manuel was going to read to her that Courtenay Wheeler was dead, and she won-

dered if she would faint,—she had never fainted in all her healthy young life,—or if she would be able to listen to the words, outwardly unchanged. So she looked out of the window, while Father Manuel scowled a little over the letter, and she saw a bush of small red roses and a slender spear of yucca flowers, and farther on, a little group of girls and young men walking with books under their arms and talking all together.

Chloe said to herself that the girls and young men must be coming from the summer school of the University. Then, to her intense horror, two tears slipped down her cheeks, and Father Manuel spoke.

“I think I can make this out,” said Father Manuel slowly. “But it’s very poor Spanish, my child. I don’t think much of your correspondent’s education.”

Chloe brushed her handkerchief across her eyes before she turned. Her knees were trembling.

“Please tell me what it says, Father.”

“Well,” said Father Manuel, frowning a little with the effort of translation, “it says something like this. ‘It is to tell you that *Señor Wheeler*’ (I think—yes—Wheeler)”

Chloe's rings cut into her tight-clasped fingers—"that Señor Wheeler *esta enfermo de muerte*,' of death, that is—we would say, is ill unto death." Father Manuel lifted his eyes not to Chloe's white set face but to the red rose nodding in at the window. "Desperately ill—yes—it goes on: 'I have been his servant here for many weeks, helping him in his extravagant task—of catching insects and making houses for them to live in. Now he burns with fever, and always he talks in his mania of *los insectos*.'" Father Manuel looked over his spectacles sedately. "Your correspondent refers to them here as 'those accursed insects—*los malditos insectos*.'" "

"Please, Father, go on!" said Chloe. A little color had come back into her face.

Father Manuel read on:

"'I think that he wishes to make a present of them,—the insects,—to some one, and because he also calls your name—the name I found upon the letter' (this is a terrible mix-up just here; I can't make out what he's done with his verb)—'the letter which he carries in his pocket like a relic' (of the blessed saints, you understand, my child)—'I think it may be for you he intends them.' (He thinks the in-

sects are for you.) 'This is to tell you that the insects are here, and that I tend them daily, although—although I fear that the Señor can never—take—them—to—you.' It is signed Luis. That," said Father Manuel thoughtfully, "is the sense of the thing—but a wild translation. What does it all mean, my child?"

"I can't tell you now." Chloe held the good priest's hand for one moment in both of hers. "But thank you, Father, ten thousand times! Father, what seems to you right is the best thing for you to do, isn't it? *Isn't it?*"

"Undoubtedly, if you see aright. Chloe, where are you going, my child?"

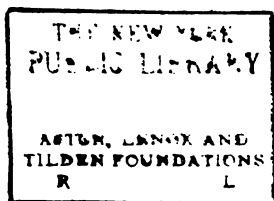
"Home," said Chloe briefly. She flung him a little wistful smile and went as quickly as she had come. Father Manuel, opportunely called the next moment to a sick parishioner, worried a little over the strange epistle of the unknown Luis and presently forgot it. Chloe, he decided, would have to explain herself at her next confession.

Chloe, in the meantime, went home with her eyes on the ground, and her lips set in a firm beautiful line. She was thinking hard every inch of the way, but her decision had been made



" Father, what seems to you right is the best thing for you to do, isn't it? " *Page 242.*

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with Father Manuel's reading the last line of that remarkable letter. When she opened the door of the house on Dufossat Street, no one came to meet her. The old bronze clock in the drawing-room was striking four, with senile clucks and chucklings.

"Mother!" called Chloe clearly.

From the door at the end of the hallway the black and woolly head of the Malone's one servant protruded suddenly.

"Yo' ma dun gone out, Mis' Chloe."

"Gone where?"

"I dunno'm. She say tell you Miss Dupré dun telefoam. She say she be back befo' dinner."

"All right, Celestine," said Chloe briefly.

Celestine's head disappeared with the suddenness of magic to be arrested at the vanishing point and recalled.

"Celestine!"

"Yas'm."

"Find this morning's paper for me, quick!"

"I got my han's in de do'," grumbled Celestine, but she produced the paper from the kitchen shelf and proffered it in a floury clasp.

Chloe nodded an absent acceptance and

went swiftly up the stairs, opening the crumpled sheets as she went. A moment later, standing beside her bed, she put her finger on the line she wanted. She had been sure, but she wanted it in black and white. Even so, she must be surer yet. She went to the telephone and called a number.

"This is the United Fruit Company's office?" she asked carefully.

"Yes? When does the *Fortuna* sail? At six this evening? She goes to Amoa—doesn't she? That's all, thank you."

Then Chloe came back into her room and stood, her hands clenched, her eyes shut tight, before the little silver crucifix hanging at the head of her bed. Words whirled through her brain, but her stillness was a prayer. She opened her eyes, and a voice that might even now be hushed for good and all echoed in her ears:

"Good-by and good luck, little pal!"

"I'm coming," said Chloe between her set teeth, as if some one had called her.

She took a suit case out from under the bed and thrust things into it with a steady hand. At the end of five minutes the suit case held all that she needed. She took the little crucifix

and laid it last of all on top of a blue silk kimono. Then she closed the suit case and locked it.

Pen and paper were on the table by the window. She sat there for five minutes more, covering three short pages with hopeless explanation. When she had written her mother's name on the envelope, she kissed it and skewered it to the mirror with a hatpin.

Far ahead of her movements her mind ran, meeting and coping with obstacles in the way. Before she left the room, carrying her suit case and with a coat over her arm, she stopped and fastened her godmother's pearls about her throat. She had no money in her purse beyond three silver dollars and a couple of quarters. She stopped again at the telephone in the hall and called Kinloch's apartments. A servant answered.

"Mr. Kinloch's just gone out—in the machine."

"When will he be in?" Chloe inquired grimly, although she knew the question for an absurdity unless her plans miscarried.

The deprecatory voice at the other end of the wire did not know when Mr. Kinloch would be in. Mr. Kinloch had not said.

Chloe hung up the receiver and drew a breath of relief.

"All right," she told herself coolly, "if that's the way it's got to be."

She left the house quietly, still in the white gown and simple black hat which she had worn earlier in the day,—there had been no time to change,—and no one saw her go. It was twenty minutes of five when she came to Canal Street, and she left her bag and coat at the drug store on the corner at which she left the car.

"I'll be back for them in about half an hour," she told the suave young man who took them from her.

"Surely," said the suave young man. He did not dream of playing Fate. He noticed merely that Chloe's eyes were unusually lovely, and that she reminded him of a girl he knew in South Bend, Indiana.

As for Chloe, she crossed the street and walked a block or two as fast as she dared, turned a corner into Royal Street and walked a block or two again until she came to the shop of M. Raspard, with its cobwebbed ceilings and dust-grimed doors, its thousand unutterable treasures of mahogany and rosewood; Sèvres

and Sheffield; turquoises green with age; and brilliants gray with dirt. M. Raspard himself stood behind the counter, spectacles astride his nose, skullcap on the back of his head, no younger than his mahogany, no cleaner than his brilliants. He smiled on Chloe with the familiarity of long acquaintance, and Chloe said to herself that if the saints did not mean her to do this thing, now was the time for them to stop her. To M. Raspard she said sweetly:

"I have come on business."

"Mrs. Malone," said M. Raspard at once, rubbing a pair of suggestively claw-like hands together, "has decided to let me have the mirror?"

It was Chloe's first intimation that the mirror of the great-great-grandmother—to that household always *the* mirror—should ever have been considered a subject for trafficking. She blushed crimson.

"You are mistaken," she said haughtily, then remembered that beggars cannot be choosers and softened her tone. Obviously, M. Raspard had not heard of her mother's altered fortune. It was in a way so much the better for Chloe's errand. She took the string of pearls

from her throat and held it drooping from her hands across the counter.

"M. Raspard, I want you to let me have two hundred and fifty on this."

M. Raspard cackled in startled amusement.

"My dear young lady!" The grimy walls of the shop seemed to echo scorn.

"It is worth, at least, five hundred," said Chloe coldly.

M. Raspard took the necklace and shuffled to a desk. He put a glass in his eye and stared at the pearls for some moments. Chloe's heart ticked the time away.

CHAPTER XX

“**Y**ES,” said M. Raspard, coming back at last, “it is worth, maybe, five hundred.” He held the string up to the light and looked at it slyly.

“I am in a great hurry,” said Chloe desperately. She spoke only French, as did the old man. “And I ask it as a favor. If I cannot pay you back, you would always have,” she choked a little over the words, “you would always have my pearls.”

“We do not carry so much in the house,” said M. Raspard, and Chloe’s heart failed her. She clenched her hands, but she kept her voice steady.

“You will not let me have it then.”

M. Raspard gestured for time and less impatience on the part of his customer.

“But I cannot tell—I will see—”

He shuffled away again, leaving Madame Lejeune’s pearls milk white against the dusty

glass of the counter. When he returned, he held a roll of bills. Chloe caught her breath at sight of them.

"It happens," he told her with maddening deliberation, "that we have a little in the safe. I did not know. It should have gone to the bank. I can let you have two hundred on the pearls, young lady."

Chloe pushed the string away from her with fingers that shook under the strain. She accepted the bills and shut them into her little black moiré bag. M. Raspard stopped her in her eager turning to the door.

"One moment, Miss Malone."

He made out a ticket—every scratch of the pen an agony to Chloe's ears.

"You must not lose this."

Chloe promised on her way to the door. She said good-by as the latch clicked behind her. With a little jerk of which she was altogether unconscious, she flung off the dust and soil of that shop of many memories.

"*You* would have wanted me to get the money that way," she told an image that flitted through her mind,—a quaintly withered image in flowered silk with waved white hair and an ebony cane to walk by.

"*You* wouldn't have minded!" she asseverated passionately.

Canal Street was crowded with the innumerable alien eyes that one's own town can sometimes show. Chloe met no one she knew in her fleet passage to the steamship office. She found herself signing her name to a ticket and receiving instructions from an old gentleman in a black alpaca coat, while the clock on the wall, above a picture of palm trees and creaming surf, showed the time to be fifteen minutes after five.

"From the Joseph Street dock," said the wearer of the alpaca coat. He offered a mild pleasantry about eleventh hour passengers and missing the boat, but Chloe never heard him.

"After to-day, when is the next boat to Amoa?" she asked sharply.

That too was for absolute certainty. She knew the schedule by heart, had known it for months.

"Not for two weeks," said the old gentleman kindly. "Not for two weeks; then the company's new boat—"

The end of that as well was lost on Chloe. She stuffed the ticket in her bag, having paid for it, and went out, leaving the door wide be-

hind her. At the corner she beckoned a taxi and drove to the drug store in which she had left the suit case and the coat. The suave young man, still thinking of South Bend, Indiana, retrieved the desired property.

"Twenty-seven minutes after five," he suggested accurately, when Chloe glanced at the clock on the wall.

After that, the slamming of the taxi-door, the slow torturing progress through Canal Street, a jolting over various grades of asphalt, out other streets, barely escaping various curbs, till the Joseph Street dock was reached, and the gangplank of the *Fortuna* came in sight.

"Just made it," said the chauffeur proudly. He touched his leather cap to Chloe and lifted her bag and coat. "I'll carry these for you, Miss."

Pushing through the little crowd at the foot of the gangplank, he added over his shoulder with a grin:

"I don't guess you know me. I'm Boggs."

"Boggs," Chloe echoed hazily. With the name the chill of a rainy night came back upon her—arc lights twinkling over puddles—the scent of valley lilies—the musty closeness of a

hired limousine—Wheeler's smile—his curt compelling voice.

"Boggs!" cried Chloe happily. She broke into an excited little laugh.

"I knew you the minute you came up," the quondam Boggs asserted warmly.

"The night of my *début*—" said Chloe, one foot on the steps leading to the gangplank.

"I drove the limousine from the Washburne Garage."

"And I called you Boggs."

"Me real name's Macaulay," said the chauffeur modestly.

He followed Chloe up the gangplank and set her suit case down upon the deck. She took her coat from him, smiling, and he stood for a moment, his cap in his hand, an altogether engaging eagerness in his eyes.

"We took a wheel off a taxi that night—maybe you remember—and busted a guy's hand."

"I remember," said Chloe softly.

There was no one she knew on the dock. She might, except for the faithful Boggs, have stood in a world of strangers, and across the river the sky grew clear with the approach of sunset.

"Seemed like a nice guy, too," suggested Boggs, with a trace of sentiment.

"He *was* a nice guy," said Chloe, tears suddenly aching in her eyes.

"If you ever see him again," said Boggs, "you—you might tell him you saw me."

An obviously romantic soul, Boggs, with a flair for the finer moments in life.

"I'll tell him—if I ever see him—Boggs," said Chloe a little brokenly. Then the bugle sounded, and Boggs, touching his cap, went ashore. By way of friendly farewell he stood till the gangplank was withdrawn, and the *Fortuna* swung out into the stream. The last thing Chloe saw on the Joseph Street dock was Boggs' respectful grin. Being quaintly superstitious, for all her courage, she took it for an omen.

But the sharpness of the memories that Boggs evoked! Standing beside the rail while the smoke of the city blurred and faded upon the sky, Chloe felt her heart stumble in her breast. Not one short year ago, that night when Boggs driving Chloe to the opera had taken the wheel off a taxi—if she remembered!—and busted a guy's hand. Not one short year, but how far away! Chloe looked back

upon the girl she had been that night as a rose might look back upon the tight green bud. She thought of her flowers, paid for out of her mother's scanty purse, of the gown she had worn, of her sapphire-blue velvet coat, and with the memory of that coat came Kinloch's face—Kinloch, the rich young man whom she had liked well enough to promise to marry. The blood crept up to Chloe's eyes. She had not believed in love, except as a sort of wonderful adventure. Well, that adventure was all of life. She knew now, going down the river away from her mother, away from the trousseau, away from the settled splendid future that was to have included the beautiful house on the Avenue, she knew now what love was worth. If she could not now find Wheeler in time, she thought to herself that the rest of her life was apt to seem hopelessly empty indeed.

That she had flown in the face of conventions that rule her caste she knew very well. She carried her head a little more proudly for the innocence of her motive. Only when she remembered her mother, her lip grew pitiful. That is the sharpened steel of choice. No more in love than in any other business can you serve two masters. Chloe shut herself away

from the picture of her mother, reading in the house on Dufossat Street that letter which Chloe had fastened to the mirror with a hatpin. Strangely, she was not afraid of the thought of Kinloch.

"He would be just as happy," she told herself grimly, "with any one of half a dozen others." That was a thought which had lain waiting in the back of her mind for a long time.

"It isn't *me* he wants; it's only my face." She visualized the look she knew in Kinloch's eyes. Her heart cried fiercely: "I want to be more than that to the man I—"

Feet came down the deck and stopped where Chloe stood.

"I am Doctor Black," said a pleasant young voice at her shoulder. "If I can be of any service in finding—"

Chloe swung on her heel, her eyes lighting with recognition.

"Why, I should have known!" she cried. "On the *Fortuna*—it's Doctor Black, of course."

Doctor Black held the hand she gave him very warmly.

"And what are you doing here? It's mighty good to see you again! You're looking well."

"Am I?" said Chloe. Her smile had faded a little, but Doctor Black was not critical.

"You're with some one, of course," he conjectured. "How is your godmother?"

In spite of herself, Chloe's eyes filled with tears. The high tension of the last few hours was beginning to tell on her.

"My godmother died almost two months ago," she said simply.

Doctor Black was genuinely shocked. He expressed an appropriate regret, during the clumsy well-intentioned phrases of which Chloe saw persistently the pearls of her godmother's gift lying in Raspard's dingy shop.

On the banks between which the *Fortuna* was sliding down the river, willows now took the place of wharfs and walls. There was no longer any town in sight, and the sky hung rosy over marshy fields. Dusk was not far off.

"You are going down just for the trip?" Doctor Black inquired presently.

Chloe's mind moved quickly. She told him nothing but the truth, but not all of that.

"I am going to Amoa. You remember Mr. Wheeler?"

"Perfectly." Doctor Black looked a kindly interest, if such were expected of him.

"He has found some parasites," said Chloe. Her tone was cool, but her hand clenched on the rail behind her. "Some very important parasites to be used in fighting the boll weevil. He is ill; and I am going down to get the parasites—to bring them up to the States."

"I see," said Doctor Black, with a touch of deference. "You're in the Federal service then, aren't you? That's fine. There's nothing you women won't do nowadays, is there?"

"Oh—" Chloe began. Then she shut her lips and let the not unnatural error go uncorrected. She was trembling a little.

"Perhaps I can count on you to go ashore with me at Amoa; you might be able to do something for—Mr. Wheeler."

"Anything I can do," promised Doctor Black.

After a moment, he gave a low whistle. "I remember now. We haven't seen him our last two or three trips. The captain spoke of it. It's certainly too bad."

"Fever, I think," said Chloe, trying to sound casual with a black fog in her soul.

"Is that so! He's a fine chap, Wheeler, isn't he?"

(What was it Boggs had said? "Seemed like a nice guy, too.")

Chloe thought the whole world must be laughing at her,—the brutal uncaring world, which until now had been her friend, her plaything, even. She knew a sudden longing for the silence and darkness of her cabin.

"Yes," she said heavily, "that is what every one says. I think I'm going down now. I'm a little tired."

CHAPTER XXI

FROM New Orleans to Amoa is six days, an inconsiderable time perhaps, but in six days the Lord made Heaven and Earth. Chloe, who had never in her life before counted time by heartbeats, stayed long hours in her cabin, on her knees by the side of the berth, her eyes burning upon the little silver crucifix which she had hung upon the wall. She heard the swish of the Gulf combers upon the side of the ship. If she lifted her glance, she saw upon the ceiling of the cabin the restless shimmer of the reflected sea. Feet passed in a vague region outside and beyond her; voices spoke, and women laughed. Three times a day a gong sounded. The ship's bells echoed sweetly out of a desert of time.

Chloe made herself a prayer in those days. When the sun woke her in the morning out of her uneasy sleep, and when the star-shine came

in at the porthole at night, Chloe said her prayer. It was pathetically simple.

"Please, God, don't let him die—I'll be good."

Between times she said it to herself, when she walked the deck for the exercise her healthy body demanded; when she lay in a steamer chair and stared at the water; when she put food to her lips, and with every sun that made its hearth-fire in the west.

What connection she found between her being good and Courtenay Wheeler's living, only Chloe herself knew. Perhaps she thought that because she had loved money and wanted luxury and been willing to give herself in marriage to get them, God meant to punish her by stopping the life of the man who, she knew now, had shown her the thing which love might mean.

She struggled against recurrent visions of Wheeler dead: the cool eyes closed, the curt voice stilled, the long-fingered, nervous brown hands folded. There is no more sensitive curse than an active imagination. A dozen times a day Chloe saw herself crouched at the side of a bed, her face hidden against a slowly chilling hand. Sometimes the picture

changed, and she saw the emptiness of the years ahead of her. That was the thing that brought her to her knees. She prayed her little prayer in good earnest then.

"Please, God, don't let him die—I'll be good."

For if you have not love, and the kingdoms of the earth are added unto you, yet you have nothing. That is what Chloe came to see in those six slow days on the *Fortuna*. She knew then that nothing that Kinloch could give her, not Paris nor London, nor the old-time splendors of Babylon and Nineveh, weighed one golden hair in the balance against Wheeler's love. She dreamed Wheeler's ring on her finger, a slim gold band. She had torn off and left on the dressing table in her room the splendid diamond of Kinloch's gift. She dreamed Wheeler's cheek against hers and woke to cry like a heart-broken child for the bitter possibility that waited her. She learned her lesson, did Chloe Malone, while the *Fortuna* plowed through the crystalline blueness of the Gulf of Mexico into the jade and ivory reaches of the Caribbean. She knew what that reckless voyage meant to her; the very possible disapproval of her world, her mother

wounded, Kinloch offended past all hope. It is entirely significant of the new Chloe that she had not five minutes of regret for what she was doing, only a little helpless ache for the pain that she must cause those others.

When she thought of her mother, her eyes grew pitiful, but if she could have turned the ship about and headed for home again, there was never one instant when she would have chosen to do so.

The *Fortuna* came to Belize and went on; came to Puerto Cortez and went on; slipped through further stretches of silken green sea silvered with whispering foam, and came to Amoa.

Chloe, an old panama hat on her head, a bit of silver in her pocket for emergencies, stood at the rail and waited. Her eyes in that six days had taken on a kind of hungry loveliness. She had always been a pretty girl; that morning she was more and less. Her face had softened and altered to the look that men follow across the world and dim when they have found it, because they never know what it is asking for.

Doctor Black passed her on the deck, turned, and came back to speak to her.

"If you like," he suggested with kindly eagerness, "we can go ashore as soon as we get in. I dare say you're anxious to get hold of your insects."

Chloe said carefully that she was. Except for Doctor Black's frequent and deferential reminders of her insects, Chloe might possibly have forgotten the *Bracons* altogether.

For, in the final analysis, what his work meant to Wheeler, Wheeler, himself, meant to Chloe. That is not the loftier thought, but it has the virtue of age and a well-established race instinct. She would have sacrificed to the work willingly, for his sake. Later this would lead her into a sane acceptance of the work at its own value. A woman like Chloe does not begin to think till she has felt.

So Doctor Black leaned against the rail, and the unending heat of the tropics rippled on the deck at Chloe's feet.

"I've been thinking," he offered; "I'd better have Wheeler brought aboard, and we can leave him in the hospital at Belize. They've got a fairly good hospital there, and I could keep you informed on each trip. What do you think? Was your information to the effect that he had malaria?"

Chloe bit dry lips.

"Fever of some sort. He was out of his head. My information came from a Spaniard,—a man who's taking care of him, I suppose."

She tried desperately to sound casual and businesslike.

"The hospital would be best then?"

"I think so—very much the best."

"You see," said Doctor Black, "he can get decent care there, and he's near enough to his work to get back to it soon as he's fit,—if he recovers."

Chloe wanted to cry out at that brutal *if*. Instead she clenched one hand and covered the whitening knuckles with the fingers of the other.

"I'll be ready to go ashore at once, then."

"Righto!" said Doctor Black, and went down the deck whistling.

There was no change in the beach or the valley or the upstanding mountains of Amoa.

"It looks as if we had been here just yesterday," said Chloe wistfully, when her feet touched the sand.

"I have been here quite a few yesterdays since then," said Doctor Black. He was full of a cheerful sort of interest. "Also, our

friend Wheeler has been here only too many yesterdays, apparently. These tropics get any man sooner or later, you know. Which the man generally knows when he goes into 'em—but such is life. Now, I'm going to see whom we can get to take us to Mr. Wheeler."

He put searching questions in a sort of broken English to the banana-loaders waiting on the beach, but the banana-loaders gestured an eloquent ignorance.

"They think I'm mad," said Doctor Black aside. "They think all Americans are mad, but harmless. You don't happen to know any Spanish, Miss Malone?"

Chloe said she did not. She was stifling under a sense of hideous unreality. The hot sun, the glaring beach, the half-naked natives, the water hissing gently on the sand,—she could shut her eyes and see Kinloch's roses, crimson in the old Chinese bowl beneath the steel engraving of Charlotte Corday. Strangely the vision startled her into quick action.

"Ask for *Luis*," she said sharply. She remembered all at once the name at the end of the letter. "*Luis!* Ask them if they know *Luis!*"

With varying inflections, Luis made the round of many lips. An undercurrent of chattering arose. Chloe's mind was focussing more clearly.

"*Los insectos*," she begged, with a quickening recollection of a quiet room and Father Manuel's surprised low tones. "*Los malditos insectos!*"

A shrill yelp of laughter came from a boy in a tattered pair of breeches. He jabbered at Chloe, pointing up the valley. *Luis* and *insectos* were the only two words of his speech that came intelligibly to Chloe's ears.

"I think we're on the right track," Doctor Black averred suddenly.

From her pocket Chloe took a coin, the only real Esperanto of the nations. She laid her hand on her breast, then on Doctor Black's arm, offered the silver to the boy, and pointed up the valley. Some discussion arose, but eventually the coin was accepted. In the wake of a lean brown youngster, Chloe and Doctor Black passed between scattered huts and into a trail that led north between tangled grasses.

"Are you up to a hike?" Doctor Black inquired.

"Anything," Chloe said simply. She set her lips tight and followed.

But it was not, after all, so long a hike. About a mile and a half up the valley, the boy turned and led them past a heavy growth of vegetation into a little clearing. There, in the steaming heat cast off by marshy ground at midday, stood two large breeding cages and a tent.

"I think we have found our friend," said Doctor Black. He went to the entrance of the tent and looked in. Presently he beckoned Chloe. His face was rather grave.

"Look," he said compassionately.

Chloe looked.

On a mosquito-netted cot in the semi-darkness of the tent, Wheeler lay quiet in a sort of stupor. His eyes were closed, and his cheeks darkly flushed with fever. There was a stubble of beard on his face. Occasionally an unintelligible mutter escaped his lips. Beside the cot an old man squatted on his haunches and waved a fan woven of palmetto fibre.

"Must be Luis," said Doctor Black softly. The old man looked up, and his shrewd black eyes lit with unmistakable relief.

"*Un momento, Señor,*" he whispered. He

laid his fan down upon the ground and came out of the tent with a kind of gliding swiftness. When he looked at Chloe, he bent suddenly into an obvious obeisance.

Chloe did not trust herself to speak. The interior of that tent had for the moment robbed her of speech or movement. She stood, clenching her hands, her heart thudding heavily, while Doctor Black and the smiling old man talked softly together in the disjointed speech that Doctor Black had tried without avail upon the banana-loaders.

Once Doctor Black exclaimed unguardedly, but for the most part he kept his voice low, and nodded his head at intervals with a kind of painful satisfaction. Presently he left Luis standing, fingering the sleeve of his rag of a shirt, and came back to Chloe.

"Malaria," he said carefully, "I'm pretty certain."

"He—has been sick long?"

"Five weeks, as far as I can make out."

"Will he—get well?"

"He's got a chance. The old man says he's been delirious right along; that's pretty bad. I'm going in to have a look at him. We'll do every living thing in our power, of course."

Doctor Black added thoughtfully; "Have a look at your insects, if you like, while I go in and make an examination; it won't take long."

So Chloe had a look at her insects, if one can be said to look at anything through eyes blind with tears and sick with fear. She stood beside the breeding cages in the midst of that breathless, steaming clearing, and over and over again she said her little prayer:

"Please, God, don't let him die—I'll be good!"

The sky above her curved blue, without a flaw. A bird whistled somewhere in the undergrowth. Doctor Black came out of the tent about ten minutes later and stood at Chloe's side.

"How are they getting on?" he asked. "The insects."

"Oh—very well—perfectly well," said Chloe a little desperately. He anticipated her agonized question, seeing in it, however, nothing more subtle than feminine nerves and sympathy.

"Well, I think Wheeler's got a chance. His fever is $102\frac{1}{2}$. We'd better get him aboard at once. I can look after him better.

He ought to have an ice-cap—and a lot of other stuff. I'm going back to the ship for a couple of men and a stretcher. Suppose you stay here and get your insects ready for transportation. It's a dickens of a hot walk in the sun. I won't be long, and it'll save you another trip."

"Well," said Chloe.

"You won't be afraid, of course."

She shook her head.

"I'll beat it, then," said Doctor Black. He called to the boy who had been resting without a shadow of apparent interest in the shade of a cocoanut palm. "I'll be back in half an hour, at the outside."

"All right," said Chloe briefly.

When the sound of Doctor Black's footsteps had died away, she went into the tent and stood beside the cot.

Beneath the net, Wheeler lay curiously quiet, his eyes shut, one thin brown hand clutching the edge of the sheet. The flush on his face gave him a semblance of health, but the stubble of beard altered him strangely and completely.

Old Luis, crouching with his fan, stood up at Chloe's approach and bowed deeply. His

soft Spanish eyes were full of reverence. He seemed to ask for something.

"... *Señorita!*" he finished eagerly, but his supplication was empty in Chloe's ears except for one word. She repeated timidly:

"Aqua—water—"

Luis nodded several times. He offered the fan and waved it to show what she must do.

"The *Señorita* stay—I get."

"You want to get water—for Mr. Wheeler?" asked Chloe. Her hands were shaking. She took the fan and knelt at the side of the cot. Old Luis lifted an earthen jug from the ground, made another grotesque bow, and went out of the tent.

So Chloe and Wheeler were together again, and Wheeler lay with closed eyes and never knew it. The tears ran down Chloe's cheeks and made little damp spots on her blouse. She moved the fan to and fro like a thing in a dream without weight or reality. Outside, the valley was hot and very still. Inside the tent, the heat and the stillness were worse, because they hung like a curtain and stifled like smoke.

"Luis," said Wheeler suddenly. He spoke in a hoarse, unsteady voice, and Chloe started and shivered. When she saw that he had

opened his eyes and was looking at her, she gave a little cry, and the fan fell from her hand, but Wheeler's eyes were without recognition. He looked at her almost angrily.

"Luis!"

Then Chloe saw that he took her for his servant.

A half-forgotten phrase came to her lips; she muttered with difficulty: "*Si señor.*"

"Have you looked after the insects?" asked Wheeler. He did not wait for an answer but went on huskily:

"Haven't I told you to let me alone and look after those cages! *I'm* all right. It's the *insects* you've got to take care of. I'm all right. Are you going to let 'em die? All my work gone for nothing. I tell you you've got to take 'em up to the States; they're waiting for them. Fix 'em up, Luis. Fix 'em up. You know what to do for 'em. Have I got to tell you again, Luis?"

"*Si señor,*" poor Chloe could not answer otherwise.

Wheeler flung one arm across his hard, thin pillow.

"You put 'em in test tubes, Luis; are you listening?"

"*Si—*"

"And put a fresh leaf in each tube; put a drop of sugar-water on the leaf—for the thing to feed on. You put 'em in test tubes—" The monotonous voice went back over the words again and again. Chloe, kneeling, fanned steadily, the tears drying on her cheeks.

"Change it every day," Wheeler's parched lips moved again, "change the leaf every day, Luis. Put 'em in test tubes."

There was a little silence in the tent.

"Luis! Luis! Answer me!"

"*Si señor,*" said Chloe.

"Swear you'll take 'em up to the States—all my work—it's all there—it's going to save the cotton States. I found it, Luis. I found my *Bracon*. I told her I would. My God, Chloe is making her trousseau. Good-by, little pal—"

"I cannot stand it," said Chloe quite simply. Suddenly she covered her face with her hands and broke into silent sobbing. The voice above her head went on, louder than ever, with a touch of impatience.

"You put 'em in test tubes—better take forty or fifty tubes—and put a leaf in each tube—they died on my hands before, and Kin-

loch asked her to lunch. Orchids on the table—I know an orchid in Brazil—Luis! I want you to swear it—swear you'll take my *Bracons* up to the States for me—swear you'll take care of 'em—swear you'll take 'em up to the States for me!"

There was an urgency of appeal in the broken words that chilled the tips of Chloe's fingers and stopped her sobs. She saw all at once that fate was kind to her. This thing which Wheeler wanted so terribly that even in his delirium he could not forget it, Chloe was there to do for him. It is not always that a woman can render that sort of service to the man she loves. Chloe laid her hand upon Wheeler's, and its touch, even through the net, fire-hot, sent little arrows of pity along her veins.

She spoke very slowly and distinctly: "*Si señor*, I swear it—I swear it!"

The promise seemed to filter through to Wheeler's tortured brain. He sighed deeply and closed his eyes.

"The queen—" he said stupidly, and Chloe knew whose dark-eyed image, crowned with mock jewels, hung in his mind.

She knelt beside the cot, fanning steadily.

Part of her ached, and that was her heart; she had not known before what heartache was. But part of her, and that was her mind, planned quietly, in a vast unnatural silence, the little details of the way in which she was to carry Wheeler's *Bracons* to the States.

Wheeler spoke once again before Luis returned with the water.

"Chloe Malone!"

"I'm here," begged Chloe, desperately eager. But even then Wheeler did not know her. He only looked at her vaguely and shut his eyes. It was not the least bruise the day inflicted.

Chloe wondered with a grim little smile if she were not going to wake presently and find herself back in the room with the great-great-grandmother's mirror. She continued to wonder until a time when, two days later, she saw Wheeler taken ashore at Belize and felt the *Fortuna* swing out to sea again, with home a dubious port beyond the blue horizon.

CHAPTER XXII

OCTOBER in New Orleans is not October in the north; paints no trees and only flings the sheerest of mists down the end of a street at sunset. Nevertheless, October in New Orleans improves upon October in Belize, and a man who had lain for nine weeks sick of a fever, like Peter's wife's mother, might very well turn his footsteps up along the Gulf to the dock at the foot of Joseph Street, might very well draw long breaths of the cooling air and stifle a sigh of relief at sight of a heavy coat.

It was the fifth of October and noon of a perfect day when Wheeler left the ship and got himself and his belongings into a taxicab. After the fashion of those who have just recovered from long fever, he had taken on flesh till he stood once more at his normal weight, and the six long days upon the sea had

bronzed him so that he looked very like himself and very little the worse for that deadly nine weeks.

He went at once to a hotel and disposed of his luggage. After that he had luncheon in the same large green and gold dining room in which Kinloch had once seated Chloe and her mother and Wheeler and himself about a bowl of lavender orchids. Wheeler remembered with a tightening lip the way the conversation had gone that day and the look in Chloe's eyes when she had turned to him. His memories ruined his appetite. He drank milk conscientiously and got away from the place as soon as he decently could. That was at one o'clock. For two hours he killed time with a controlled deliberation, but at the instant of three he walked up the steps of the house on Dufossat Street and rang the bell with a keenly nervous forefinger.

Celestine admitted him without recognition.

"Miss Chloe say she be down in er min'it," she announced upon the threshold of the drawing-room, and Wheeler realized that the message was not for him. From the corner of the sofa Kinloch rose leisurely. Celestine's

slipshod steps sounded down the hall and stopped with the closing of a door, while the two men looked at each other in silence.

"How are you?" said Kinloch at last.

"Pretty well, thanks," Wheeler returned with an equally determined courtesy. "And you?"

Kinloch's gesture of indifference was eloquent. He said after a second: "Sit down, won't you?"

Wheeler took a chair by the window, and Kinloch returned to his sofa. There was an inevitable and awkward pause. One man looked at his finger nails, the other looked out of the window. At last Wheeler spoke abruptly. His taut nerves sang under the tension.

"I don't know whether I am to congratulate you—"

"Oh, don't you?" Kinloch inquired, not so smoothly as before. He had begun to flush a little, angrily.

Wheeler was outwardly cool.

"May I ask—"

"Go as far as you like," said Kinloch, drumming on the arm of the sofa. "Nobody has a better right."

Wheeler's eyes turned keen and cold as steel.

"I don't pretend to understand you."

There was a sulky menace in Kinloch's shrug.

"You seem pretty much at home here."

"I got in from Amoa only to-day," said Wheeler icily.

Kinloch looked at him sharply, his expression changing a little.

"You did? Well—" he hesitated, finished with a frown. "I got back from a hunting trip to Canada this morning myself. Been gone about two months." He leaned back, folding his arms and crossing his legs.

He looked rather florid and very sullen. It was not hard to imagine that wounded pride had in those last two months been seeking consolation by dubious methods.

"I have not seen Miss Malone since the last of July," said Kinloch suddenly. He added with deliberate intention: "You have seen her since then?"

Wheeler's look suggested clearly his disapproval of the question. He answered coldly: "Not since May."

"Oh—you didn't see her in Amoa?"

"Was Miss Malone in Amoa this summer?"

A vein swelled in Kinloch's forehead. He made no answer beyond a little sneering twist at one corner of his mouth.

Wheeler got up and walked across the room till he stood at Kinloch's elbow. He put his hands in his pockets and kept them there. He spoke very quietly but distinctly.

"I was ill with a fever for nine weeks this summer, half of July, all of August, and half of September. The greater part of that time I was out of my head. I have been told that Miss Malone was in Amoa, but I have no personal recollection of the fact. I don't particularly care for your tone, Mr. Kinloch, and I would suggest that you change it."

"Have you got the nerve to ask me to?" said Kinloch fiercely.

Neither man had spoken above an undertone, but the air of the quaint old room was heavy with storm. Quite clearly, out of a moment's silence, Chloe's heels sounded on the stairs. Kinloch stood up, and Wheeler moved aside. Presently a white hand touched the crimson curtains, and Chloe stood in the doorway.

Celestine had not thought it necessary to announce Wheeler's arrival. One young man, or two young men, what was the difference? In Celestine's estimation, the more the merrier. And there had been rather a dearth of young men about the house on Dufossat Street in the last dull month or so.

Hence Chloe came prepared for Kinloch's reproaches, unprepared for the sight of Wheeler and the sound of his voice. She stopped on the threshold, the color going out of her face, and caught her hands together. Then, because there was race in her, and she had, after all, tried at the last to be true to herself, she managed a little smile of welcome and came on into the room. She did not offer her hand to either man.

"How do you do, Miss Malone?" said Wheeler coolly.

Kinloch said: "How are you, Chloe?"

A mad little laugh fluttered in Chloe's throat. It was all so tragically like a scene in some absurd French farce. She sat down in a corner of the sofa, and Kinloch, with an unexpected assumption of proprietorship, sat down beside her. Wheeler stood with one elbow on the mantel-shelf, looking down into the

empty grate. Only a blind woman could have missed the antagonism written on the two men's faces,—Wheeler's more or less controlled, Kinloch's savagely frank. It was not an atmosphere into which to fling a careless word. One felt that any syllable might set off hidden mines. Curiously though, with the sight of Chloe's lovely, paling face, the sound of her perfunctory welcome, all of Kinloch's anger turned itself against Wheeler. He no longer wore the little sneer that Chloe's name had brought to his lips. She felt his eyes on her face and turned aside.

"I—I did not know," she said formally to Wheeler, "that you were in New Orleans." Then she fancied that his shoulders drooped a little tiredly, and her heart sent softer accents hurrying to her lips.

"You are quite, quite well again?"

"Quite, thank you," said Wheeler. He looked at her only once, but with sufficient directness to lower her lashes.

"And you are just back from Canada?" said Chloe to Kinloch. It was not an easy moment. She was merely handling it as best she could. But Kinloch had no time for small talk. He gave a short laugh.

"I was just telling Wheeler that he'd seen you since I had."

"And I was just telling Mr. Kinloch," said Wheeler coldly, "that I did not remember having seen you since May."

Chloe looked from one to the other, the blood creeping up to her forehead. She held herself haughtily still. But Kinloch got up with a movement of uncontrollable irritation. He walked down the room and back again, his hands rammed deep in his pockets. When he stood beside the table, with Wheeler directly across from him, he tapped the marble-topped rosewood of a more reticent generation heavily with his forefinger.

"Oh, let's come to a show-down! What's the good of pretending we've nothing to say to each other! We've got to have it out, sooner or later."

"Need we annoy Miss Malone with the process?" Wheeler inquired distantly.

Kinloch shook his head. Below that mahogany-colored hair his face looked rather heavy, and a little too stubborn for entire coolness of judgment.

"Miss Malone's not going to be annoyed. You can leave that to me."

Wheeler made no comment of any sort whatever, and the other man went on with a little flare of something very like bravado.

"I've got a question I want to ask you, Wheeler; you know, don't you, that Miss Malone is engaged to *me*?"

A wandering breeze slammed the window blind softly. Chloe shut her hand hard on the arm of the sofa. Wheeler was speaking.

"You may remember," he said evenly, "that I asked you a little while ago if I were to congratulate you. You evaded the question then."

"I'm telling you now," said Kinloch savagely.

With a stifled little sound of shame and anger, Chloe got to her feet. She, too, came to stand at the table.

"Dan," she said, "have you been to your rooms?"

"Yes," Kinloch admitted reluctantly.

"Then," said Chloe, her lips unsteady but her head high, "you must have read the letter I sent there—with a little box—" she stopped his confused protest with a gesture of her ringless left hand.

"Wait, please! I wrote that letter breaking

the engagement the day that I got back from Amoa. You left no address for me, so I couldn't send it after you."

"You might have written it the day you *left* for Amoa instead of the day you got back," said Kinloch. He dropped the matter of the engagement abruptly. The little sneer returned. He saw himself in the position of one who makes a bold throw and loses. It is at no time a flattering vision, and Kinloch had not been accustomed to defeat.

"I hadn't time," said Chloe simply. "I tried to get you on the telephone and couldn't. I did leave a letter for my mother, asking her to tell you where I was." Her soft slow voice stumbled. "In any case, you showed me very clearly how you felt about it. When I came back, you had gone; you left no word, and you never wrote me. I could only suppose you wanted the engagement broken," she added after a moment, very clearly, "as I did."

There was a queer little pause, in which Kinloch whistled below his breath.

"I'm sorry," said Chloe, her eyes suddenly wet, "if I wasn't fair to you. But—we're quits. You haven't been very fair to me, lately, I think."

Kinloch left off whistling and straightened his tie.

"All right," he said in an oddly different tone, "we're quits."

It seemed almost, and with entire unexpectedness, as though the thought held some curious ability to soothe the laceration of his pride.

"We're quits."

"You practically broke the engagement yourself," Chloe reminded him proudly.

Kinloch looked grim, but his eyes were not so sullen now. He stood for a moment without moving, then:

"I reckon that lets me out," he said. He made sardonic adieux, nodded brusily to Wheeler, ignored Chloe's mutely and impulsively offered hand and went. The front door presently closed behind him. Upon which Chloe caught her breath in an hysterical little sound between a laugh and a sob.

Wheeler stood without speaking, and the room was very still.

"I tried," said Chloe at last. She made a little hopeless gesture of one hand. "It doesn't look like it, but I did try to be fair to him. I hated terribly to hurt him. It's funny

in a way. I had such wonderful ideas of what I was going to do. And where are they now? I was going to do everything for my mother, and I've only made her unhappy. She adored Dan—"

"After all," Wheeler suggested quietly, "it wasn't your mother who was going to marry Kinloch."

Chloe went on, unheeding, her face a little dreary, like an unjustly punished child's.

"And he was good to me. I thought I was being so wise and cool—about marrying—"

"But after all," said Wheeler again, "can any one be wise and cool—about marrying?"

It was so flagrant a violation of all his own old creeds that he laughed aloud, a short surprised laugh.

"Look at me, Chloe Malone!" he said.

Chloe went blindly into his outstretched arms, her white hands fluttering down to the hands that held her.

"I can't believe it's you," she told him brokenly. "I've dreamed night after night of that dreadful valley—the heat and the stillness—and you, talking—not knowing what you said—just talking, talking. I'll never be able to forget it!"

She felt his lips on her hand and on her hair. He held her close.

"Isn't there something about being off with the old love—before you're on with the new?" she whispered desperately, her face hidden. "Do you think I'm shameless? I never loved him. I told him at the first I didn't love him. I only liked him, and I didn't know any better. I thought I didn't believe in marrying for love."

"Oh, you don't!" said Wheeler, in a voice that was for him curiously unsteady. She felt his hand beneath her chin, lifting her face, turning it to the pitiless light. She made a little helpless show of resistance.

"You came into that jungle after *me*," he said. Her eyelids trembled down before the fire in his smothered words. "Oh, Luis told me! I went back to Amoa as soon as I could stand, and he told me all about the angel out of Heaven who had come in answer to his letter—and his prayers—and taken me and *los malditos insectos* away, on the *Fortuna*. When you thought I was done for, you threw over everything—to come and help me. That's what I call a pal!" She could feel his heart leaping just beneath her cheek. "That's

what I call a sweetheart! God! Chloe, that's the sort of a woman a man wants to call his *wife!*"

He kissed her mouth then, and Chloe knew all at once and forever why she had let Kinloch kiss her only on the cheek.

Some other things she knew too, which had been dark to her before; mere trifles such as what the world was made for, why she had ever been born, and the thing that is the song of the morning stars.

Out of the heart of the time-old haze she took his hand and drew him to the window.

"Look," she said. Her lips made a love song of the word.

Wheeler looked. It was a back window and gave upon the Malones' back yard, gay just then with ruddy and orange and gold-colored chrysanthemums. In the middle of the yard stood a cage of fine wire netting; inside the cage were various long glass jars with muslin tied over the tops. There was a certain amount of green stuff in the cage, and a cat lay contentedly beneath it, on guard, in a manner of speaking.

"I didn't dare send them to any one else, be-

cause I didn't know," said Chloe anxiously, "if they would give you the credit of it."

Wheeler thanked her, startlingly and completely. Only his cool, controlled sort of man knows how to take the brakes off when he chooses.

"Not that I was looking for the credit of the thing," he added, with a long-drawn breath of relief. "It's the personal satisfaction of doing what you set out to do. You mean to say you've got a whole colony of 'em really alive out there? I can't believe it."

"But I've read every book on *Bracons* I could get hold of. I've looked after them like invalids. I've even," insisted Chloe, with the tenderest little grimace in the world, "I've even had mother picking pigweed for them—and that wasn't easy."

Wheeler caught her back into the shade of the window curtains. He looked at her for a long moment before he kissed her, as a man kisses only the woman he had never believed existed.

"Well," he said huskily, "Luis told me you'd taken the *Bracons* away with you, but I never dreamed you could get them up here alive; and as for keeping them going—I fully expected

to have to go back and begin all over again. Thanks to you, I'm just a year ahead of where I thought I was."

His voice broke, that curt amused voice that even in Chloe's dreams had never wavered.

"Chloe Malone," he said passionately, "*you wonder!*"

He bent his head and set his lips adoringly upon the palm of her little hand.

THE END





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